

Environment and Parks—Drinking Water Follow-up

SUMMARY

In 2006 we audited the Department of Environment and Parks' systems to manage drinking water.

We recommended the department improve its drinking water information systems by:

- updating forms to meet standards and improving reporting capacity
- coordinating information systems at regions to avoid overlap
- using data to improve program effectiveness and efficiency

The department had previously implemented the six other recommendations from our 2006 report.¹

What we examined

We followed up on the outstanding recommendation from our 2006 report.

Overall conclusion

The department has implemented our recommendation. Systems reporting capacity has improved and meets users' needs. An enhanced system for drinking water inspections helped improve the program efficiency and effectiveness. The department eliminated overlapping systems and implemented an effective process that ensures forms are up to date.

AUDIT OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

Our audit objective was to determine if the department had implemented our 2006 recommendation to improve drinking water information systems.

Our 2012 follow-up audit found that the department planned to resolve the inherent limitations of its main drinking water information system through the system redesign or replacement. Therefore, this audit also examined the department's progress in acting on its plan.

We conducted our field work from June to October 2015 and substantially completed our audit on October 30, 2015. We conducted our audit in accordance with the *Auditor General Act* and the standards for assurance engagements set out by the CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance.

FINDINGS

Information Systems—implemented

Background

The department regulates 670 drinking water facilities and water distribution systems in Alberta. The department inspects all drinking water facilities at least every two years.

¹ *Report of the Auditor General of Alberta—October 2006*, no. 4, page 52.

The Environmental Management System is one of the key information systems for drinking water as well as other programs for which the department is responsible.

The department maintains inspections data in SharePoint, a system separate from EMS, as of 2011. The department continues to use EMS for all other information on the drinking water program, including its approval and some compliance actions.

The department delivers the drinking water program through its Edmonton office and regional offices.

Our audit findings

Using data to improve effectiveness and efficiency

In 2011 the department updated its risk-based inspection form and guidelines and implemented SharePoint² to improve the effectiveness of inspection planning for drinking water facilities. The guidelines require inspectors to analyze facility data, such as a turbidity and chlorine levels, in assessing the risk associated with a facility not meeting standards or approval conditions. Our testing confirmed inspectors comply with the guidelines.

Updating forms

The department implemented a process to monitor changes in standards and legislation to help ensure relevant forms are updated as needed. Our testing found the department's processes to be effective.

Improving reporting capacity

The department improved EMS capacity to provide standard and custom reports on various aspects of the drinking program, such as approval conditions and incidents. The department's drinking water staff use the reports, which meet their operational needs.

Coordinating information systems

Our testing found that regions use the two corporate systems, EMS and SharePoint, to maintain drinking water data. The implementation of SharePoint has resolved the EMS difficulties that caused some regions to maintain their own information systems.

Our interviews with inspectors determined that SharePoint is easier to use than EMS.

Finding long-term solutions for EMS

The department continues to improve EMS, by correcting known problems and limitations, to help ensure the system appropriately supports the program and meets user needs. SharePoint is a temporary solution for some of these EMS limitations. The department has not yet identified a long-term solution for the inherent limitations of EMS.

² SharePoint is a web-based system that contains the department's drinking water inspections data.