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## Update - Municipal Compliance with Federal Wastewater Regulations

The federal **Wastewater System Effluent Regulations** (WSER) came into effect in 2012 and includes mandatory minimum effluent quality standards for wastewater treatment systems that handle more than 100 cubic metres (m<sup>3</sup>) of wastewater per day, which serves roughly 200 or more people.

Under the WSER, municipalities who have systems that meet this volume threshold are required to undertake **reporting** to ensure compliance. A complete list of reporting municipalities is available [here](#). If your municipality has a wastewater treatment plant handling 100m<sup>3</sup> or more and is not on this list, it is at risk of being penalized for not reporting and failing to meet effluent standards. Environment Canada's anticipated enforcement will start with outreach and progress to penalties under the *Fisheries Act* similar to the \$70,000 fine charged to an Alberta municipality in 2011 for discharging a deleterious substance into a waterbody containing fish.

### *Harmonizing standards*

Until WSER came into effect, municipalities only needed to comply with and report on provincial regulations. Alberta's municipal associations have been calling for the provincial and federal governments to complete an equivalency agreement needed to harmonize wastewater standards and reduce the administrative burden on municipalities. However, it was recently determined that Alberta's standards cannot be deemed as equivalent because they are set out in provincial policies and guidelines as opposed to being codified in regulations. In response to this issue, the Government of Alberta now has three options:

- Continue to pursue an equivalency agreement by updating provincial regulations
- Pursue an administrative agreement where both regulations apply, but the province is delegated authority to administer certain aspects of the federal regulation
- Maintain the status quo

Of these options, pursuing an equivalency agreement would likely provide the most benefit to municipalities as it would harmonize reporting requirements and provide a clear regulatory framework for wastewater effluent. Regardless of the option pursued, municipal systems that handle more than 100 m<sup>3</sup> of wastewater per day need to meet the effluent quality standards set out in the WSER. Additional developments will be shared as they become available.

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