

Kelowna News



File photo: Kelly Hayes - Castanet

Stormwater cause of great concern

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Delegates have gathered in Kelowna from every corner of B.C. for this week's "From Rain to Resource: Managing Stormwater in a Changing Climate," Workshop and Trade Show.

Delegates are here to learn about the newest information and technologies available to prepare their communities for the tremendous rains that are expected with climate change.

Chris Johnston is a stormwater specialist with the engineering firm Kerr Wood Leidal Associates in Burnaby and one of the event's speakers.

Speaking to the need for this type of provincial conversation, he said that B.C.'s communities are facing a number of issues because of the way we've designed our cities in the past.

"Today, we see stormwater running off roads, carrying pollutants and causing contaminants to enter our drinking water supplies. We see erosion of banks along rivers and streams, hurting fish populations. With climate change, these issues are going to be magnified," says Johnston, also a member of BCWWA's Climate Change Committee.

"The cost to up-size the current infrastructure would be incredibly high. Building our cities differently will be the key.

It's fantastic to see so many elected officials and municipal staff registered. There's some great work being done in this province, but we need to push the ball further and it's going to take their leadership and their efforts to prepare our communities for what's ahead."

He says there are solutions, noting rain gardens, stormwater harvesting and retrofitting infrastructure are just a few of the ideas that will be discussed over the next two days.

"Low impact development, thinking green, and climate change awareness is growing and there's a greater interest in applying these understandings to building our cities," says Brock Dolman, Director of the California-based WATER Institute, and who will be providing the keynote address on Friday.

"It comes from a recognition that if you want water security and a resilient society, you have to look after water."

Dolman will be sharing what he has learned as a watershed restoration consultant for the last 15 years.

But just as importantly, he says he is looking forward to learning from others and taking that information back to his community.

"Water is non-partisan and all life forms need it. We all share this place and it is incumbent upon us to look after our watersheds. Future generations will thank us for being proactive."

In addition to a number of speakers lined up to discuss best practices in managing stormwater over the two days, a trade show has been organized, highlighting companies at the forefront of developing innovative rainwater management tools.