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NEWS

Time for 'the talk' about invasive mussels in B.C. lakes says Okanagan Basin Water Board



West Kelowna Mayor Doug Findlater, chairman of the Okanagan Basin Water Board, announcing Tuesday in Kelowna that the public is being enlisted to help keep invasive mussels out of B.C. Lakes. — Image Credit: Alistair Waters/Capital News





by [Alistair Waters - Kelowna Capital News](#)
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The Okanagan Basin Water Board is enlisting the public's help to fight the spread of invasive zebra and quagga mussels into the area lakes.

A new part of its Don't Move A Mussel campaign is asking locals to "have a talk" with friends and relatives come here brings watercraft used in other parts of Canada and U.S.

"We know that it isn't always easy to have such a conversation, encouraging people to be good stewards of our waters," said Corinne Jackson, OBWB's communications director, responsible for Okanagan Water Wise and the Don't Move A Mussel campaign. "But if you love our lakes, it's OK to have the talk. We need people to understand that the best way to prevent the spread is to clean, drain and dry their watercraft, (and fishing gear and water toys). We need people to understand the importance of stopping at roadside inspection stations."

She said since the Okanagan Basin Water Board and its Okanagan WaterWise program launched the Don't Move A Mussel campaign in 2013, the level of awareness regarding invasive zebra and quagga mussels has exploded in the valley.

"According to B.C.'s provincial mussel inspectors, the Okanagan has the highest level of awareness than anywhere in B.C.

"Now the program is aiming to take its Don't Move A Mussel message beyond the Okanagan, enlisting the support of its residents to help protect the valley's waters, encouraging people to "have the talk," with out-of-town guests, and others," said OBWB chairman, West Kelowna Mayor Doug Findlater.

As part of the effort, the www.DontMoveAMussel.ca website has been updated with information about having the talk, and new radio ads, bus ads and social media ads have been launched. As well, new Don't Move A Mussel muscle shirts are being distributed by Okanagan WaterWise and partners.

"As we've said in the past, we are thankful to see Conservation Officers out conducting inspections this summer, and thankful to industry for financing the program. Now, as we see the number of mussel-infested boats being caught continue to climb, and as we hear about the number of watercraft being quarantined, and the growing number of folks being ticketed for not stopping at mandatory inspection stations, we all need to step up our game," Findlater said.

As of July 27, since eight inspection stations opened April 1 in B.C., almost 13,000 watercraft have been inspected. Of those, 439 were identified as coming from high-risk areas and nine were found carrying invasive mussels, all from Ontario. Another 50 were quarantined to meet the 30-day drying off period to ensure any mussels attached were dead, 37 people were issued violation tickets and 27 were given warnings for failing to stop for inspection.

But the water board is continuing to push the province to expand its inspection hours from eight to 10 hours per day, seven days a week, to at least daylight hours, and to revise its legislation to require all watercraft entering B.C. to report to an inspection centre before launching in provincial waters.



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"We are also urging the federal government to match \$4 million in U.S. funding to assist with inspection programs on the Canadian side of the border, and ensure Canada Border Services officers are enforcing federal regulations by stopping and interviewing all those coming into Canada with watercraft to determine if an inspection and decontamination is necessary, said Findlater.

It has been estimated that if the destructive mussels get into Okanagan Lake, the cost per year to deal with the problems they would create could be as much as \$42 million.

Jackson said it could also effect the water quality in the lake, a source of drinking water for thousands of residents in the Central Okanagan.

For more information on the mussels, the risks to the Okanagan, and prevention tips – including how to Clean-Drain-Dry – visit www.DontMoveAMussel.ca. To hear the “Have the Talk” radio ads go to <http://dontmoveamussel.ca/more>.

