

Hullcar source under review

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Government officials insist the source of water contamination still isn't known in a Spallumcheen neighbourhood.

While some residents have suggested high nitrates come from the spraying of manure above the Hullcar aquifer, the Interior Health Authority insists that hasn't been determined.

"Nitrates are tough to trace," said Rob Birtles, IHA's team lead for small water systems and infrastructure, at Tuesday's Okanagan Basin Water Board meeting.

"We all contribute nitrates and it's tough to determine who is the biggest contributor."

Beyond manure, Birtles, who is also an OBWB director, says other possible sources of nitrates are residential septic tanks and lawn fertilizer.

"We don't understand enough about the aquifer to know where the nitrates are coming from."

The shallow aquifer is about 14-square-kilometres in size, and Birtles believes random samples of the water may not help identify contamination.

"We need to understand the characteristics of the aquifer. We need to identify areas for hot spots for isotope testing," he said.

A working group with representation from three provincial ministries along with Interior Health, will work with local farmers, water districts and First Nations to try and address concerns with the Hullcar aquifer.

"I was struck by the strength of the response from the Ministry of Environment," said Anna Warwick Sears, OBWB executive director.

The ministry contacted OBWB directly about the process.

"I feel like the ministry took the issue seriously and has a plan going forward," said Warwick Sears.

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