



Drinking Water Western Canada News

# Connecting the Okanagan Through A 'One Water Approach'

By Simran Chattha - June 5, 2020 271 0

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Researchers at UBC Okanagan are launching a community-focused research program to assess the performance of water utilities and municipalities across the Okanagan Valley.

The project, funded by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), will serve as a foundation for analyzing the drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater services for several communities across the Okanagan region.

"Although all the systems are independent, they all face the similar challenges when it comes to rapid population growth, aging infrastructure, and climate change," said Rehan Sadiq, professor of civil engineering and lead researcher on the project. "Our goal is to develop a data-sharing platform, assessment tools, and benchmarking strategies through a 'one water approach' to enable continuous monitoring and improvements to the systems."



The four-phase project will investigate state-of-the-art practices in urban water management. At the same time, researchers will identify and develop performance indicators as well as a performance assessment and benchmarking framework. The researchers will also create a portal for information analysis, sharing, and learning.

The Okanagan Valley is a mix of urban and rural communities serviced by small to medium-sized water utilities, municipalities, and regional districts, explained Sadiq. Signing on to the 'one water approach' will allow these systems to share their collective data and learn from each other practices and experiences.

"There are so many similarities within our infrastructure and usage that being involved in a comparative study just makes sense," said Ed Hoppe, water quality and customer care supervisor at the City of Kelowna.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board is also a stakeholder in the research. For the past 50 years, the board has been providing leadership on water issues that span the valley.

"To have access to the resources and researchers at UBC is invaluable for our communities, and will help us continue to address our water needs into the future," said Anna Warwick Sears, executive director of the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

With funding from NSERC's Collaborative Research and Develop Grant, the researchers will spend the next four years analyzing and developing tools to maintain and improve the region's water systems. The goal, said Sadiq, is to create clear benchmarks that all water systems can strive to reach.

"What I'm proposing is we should all work together to identify where we are based on existing resources, determine how can we do better, and learn from each other—that is performance benchmarking," Sadiq said. "It has to be a continuous performance improvement process. It exists in the corporate sector, it exists in the manufacturing sector, it exists in all other industries. Why don't we treat water the same way?"

The project is also supported by the City of Kelowna, City of West Kelowna, City of Vernon, District of Peachland, District of Lake Country, Town of Osoyoos, Regional District of North Okanagan and Okanagan Basin Water Board. It is expected that more community partners from the Valley will also join this project.

"Water is often taken for granted, especially in the Okanagan," said Sadiq. "But it's so vital to our existence. Through this research, we look forward to empowering our communities to address their water needs. And ensure everyone has safe, and clean water to drink."

Learn more about the one water approach here.

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