

September 15, 2021

## NEWS RELEASE

# WESTERN CANADA AQUAHACKING CHALLENGE 2021 WINNERS ANNOUNCED – TEAMS SET TO SOLVE WATER WOES

**Kelowna, B.C.** – The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) and AquaAction co-hosted a live-streaming of the *AquaHacking 2021 – Western Canada Challenge* finals yesterday afternoon, on Sept. 14. Three teams pitched their solutions to some of the regions most pressing water issues. Judges and participants voted for final placement and awarding of \$45,000 in seed funding, helping teams take their water solutions to market.

The winners are:

3<sup>rd</sup> place – **Eco-Water** from *University of Saskatchewan*, winning \$10,000 in seed funding for their project which addresses optimization of wastewater treatment plants with their innovative Eco-Model and Eco-Filter, to remove pollutants, including pharmaceuticals, from wastewater before it's released back into the environment.

2<sup>nd</sup> place – **Eledigm** from *UBC Okanagan*, tackling contamination of drinking water in cisterns by developing a hydraulic coupling for water delivery hoses and cistern lid, took home \$15,000 in seed funding.

1<sup>st</sup> place – **The SIP Project** from *UBC Okanagan*, taking on drinking water contamination with a mobile filtration station in the form of a gravity filter backpack, won top prize - \$20,000 to help get their project off the ground.

In addition, all finalist teams were awarded a spot in a local business incubator to help them with their new start-up, and legal support from Lavery Lawyers.

An additional \$1,500 was awarded to the Audience Top Choice, Eco-Water.

“We are incredibly excited and proud to be the champions of the AquaHacking 2021 - Western Canada Challenge,” said SIP Project team member Elana Wood, “We have learned so much throughout this journey and it has been an amazing, once in a lifetime experience. We are looking forward to the future for Team SIP and are working to bring our product to market to help end water disparity ‘One SIP at a Time!’ Above all, we are so grateful to the AquaHacking network and to all of our mentors and supporters.”

“The persistence and passion shown by these teams to develop solutions to fresh water issues is inspiring and timely,” added Kariann Aarup, Executive Director of AquaAction. “As the world seeks to mitigate the impacts of climate change and ensure healthy freshwater for future generations, ingenuity such as this gives us hope,” she said

Anna Warwick Sears, OBWB Executive Director, agreed. “To see all these young people, who are putting so much thought and effort into developing solutions, and being a force for good, is really heartening.

“For sure, the AquaHacking program is an incredible learning experience for them, but all three projects are also very important,” Sears added. “They’re wonderful, genuine solutions to hard problems.”

What’s also incredible is that, due to COVID-19, recruiting was all done online. Teams, with members in different Canadian and even International time zones, such as those in Japan, Qatar, Syria and Russia, did



their research and developed their solutions remotely. Several are second year university students, not long out of high school. "It's all pretty amazing," said Sears.

To watch the broadcast of the Western Canada AquaHacking Challenge final, visit <https://youtu.be/JljCAoEzCXs>. A program with more on the teams, their solutions, the judges and more, can also be found at <https://bit.ly/3BZBci5>.

Special thanks to Western Canada AquaHacking Challenge sponsors: De Gaspe Beaubien Foundation, RBC Foundation, Ovivo, Lavery Lawyers, IBM, Mitacs, Teck Resources, and Central Okanagan Foundation.

Please find a Backgrounder with Fast Facts attached below.

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## BACKGROUND & FAST FACTS

### About AquaAction

AquaAction is a non-profit organization dedicated to raising awareness of water issues among Canadians. Its flagship program, the AquaHacking Challenge, is an innovative competition that engages young Canadians in developing entrepreneurial skills and creating tech solutions to freshwater issues. Since 2015, eight challenges have been held, resulting in 28 start-ups which continue to be active to this day. The Western Canada AquaHacking Challenge is one of two challenges being held across Canada this year. The second is taking place in Rivière des Mille Îles in Quebec. Find out more at <https://aquahacking.com>.

### About Okanagan Basin Water Board

The **Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB)** is unique to Canada and was formed in 1970 as a valley-wide partnership to identify and resolve critical water issues in the Okanagan watershed. Its Board of Directors includes representatives from the three Okanagan regional districts, the Okanagan Nation Alliance, the Water Supply Association of BC and the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council (OWSC) – a technical advisory body to the board. The OBWB provides three main services: a Milfoil Control Program, Sewage Facilities Grants Program, and the Water Management Program which includes the OWSC, Water Research, Water Conservation and Quality Improvement Grants, and Communications and Outreach. Learn more at <https://www.obwb.ca/>.

### Western Canada AquaHacking Challenge by the numbers:

- 137 participants registered from post-secondary institutes across Western Canada, Ontario and Quebec, forming 21 teams, of which 10 pitched at the semi-final in May 2021.

### Western Canada AquaHacking Challenge issues:

- Optimization of drinking water/wastewater treatment plants
- On-farm nutrient capture and recycling
- Innovative 'social' technologies for water innovation
- Toxic algae blooms

### More on the three finalist teams:

- **THE SIP PROJECT** (UBC Okanagan) – Issue: optimization of drinking water and innovative social technologies. Solution: A mobile filtration station in the form of a gravity filter backpack. *Team members: Elana Wood, Yosamin Esanullah, and Mana Tokuni in Kelowna, and Yamen Shehab in Doha, Qatar.*
- **ELEDIGM** (UBC Okanagan) – Issue: optimization of drinking water. Solution: Focusing on improving water quality in Indigenous communities, the team developed a device to help prevent water contamination in water cisterns using a hydraulic coupling on the water delivery hose and the cistern lid. *Team members: Sydney Strocen of Winnipeg, Mikhail Ignatyev, Tarek Alkabanni and Andre Cox, all from Kelowna.*
- **ECO-WATER** (University of Saskatchewan) – Issue: optimization of wastewater treatment plants. Solution: Use of their innovative Eco-Model (Fate Models) to improve wastewater treatment plant efforts to remove pollutants, including pharmaceuticals, Endocrine Disruptor Compounds, and pesticides, before releasing water back into the environment. Fate models estimate contaminant concentrations over time. In addition, use of their Eco-Filter to maximize pollutant removal using agricultural biomass residues (e.g. straw) as adsorption for final filtration. *Team members: Khaled Zoroufchi Benis, Shahab Minaei and Mohsen Asadi, all of Saskatoon.*

**AquaHacking Challenge funders:** De Gaspé Beaubien Foundation, RBC Foundation, Ovivo, Lavery Lawyers, IBM, Mitacs, Teck Resources, and Central Okanagan Foundation.



**Advisory committee members** include representation from: the United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health, International Institute for Sustainable Development – Experimental Lake Area, Innovate BC, International Joint Commission, Western Economic Diversification Canada, Sustainable Development Technology Canada, The Gordon Foundation, BC Water Funders Collaborative, the Okanagan Sustainability Leadership Council, WaterSmart Solutions, Purppl, Associated Environmental Consultants, and Water Rangers.

**Water issue leaders** who helped mentor participants include representatives from: the Universities of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Waterloo, Okanagan College, Canadian Water and Wastewater Association, and Canadian Water Resources Association. Additional academic partners include: UBC and UBC Okanagan, Simon Fraser University, University of Calgary and Red River College.

**Implementation partners** include: Hackworks, Waterlution, and the OBWB's Okanagan WaterWise education and outreach program.