



# Drinking Water Source Protection Primer:

## For Real Estate Sales Representatives

This primer was developed to help you understand the impact of drinking water source protection – so you can provide your clients (whether you represent a buyer or a seller) with relevant information about the property for sale.

### What is drinking water source protection?

We all rely on safe, sustainable drinking water. While municipal drinking water in Ontario is considered safe and reliable – it's important to consider the source of the water that comes into your municipality's treatment plant. Protecting the water at its source is an important first step in the drinking water safety net.

Ontario has a comprehensive Drinking Water Source Protection Program to ensure sources of municipal drinking water are protected now and into the future. Under this program, local source protection plans developed under the *Clean Water Act, 2006*, are in place. These plans contain policies that protect municipal drinking water sources from contamination and overuse.



### Where does our drinking water come from?

Our province's drinking water comes from surface water sources including lakes and rivers, and from groundwater sources through wells drawing from aquifers. Aquifers are water-bearing layers of sand, gravel and rock, underneath the ground.

To find out if a property is located in a drinking water vulnerable area, search the Source Protection Information Atlas at the Government of Ontario website: [ontario.ca/page/source-protection](https://ontario.ca/page/source-protection).

## What is a vulnerable area?

Drinking water source protection is based on science. Local scientific data was used to create maps that show vulnerable areas – which can be located on residential, agricultural or commercial, rural or urban, developed or undeveloped lands.

The land around municipal wells and intakes is especially sensitive because it contributes to a municipal drinking water supply source. In these areas, we need to pay attention to activities causing contamination and overuse of our drinking water sources.

## What *might* this mean for my client?

If any part of the property is located in a vulnerable area, then certain activities may be restricted on the property, or in rare cases prohibited. Your potential buyer needs to be aware of their responsibilities under the *Clean Water Act*, and local source protection plan policies.

If a property is changing hands and/or uses, then policies may require that a risk management

plan be put in place. The local risk management official or inspector will work with the landowner (or renter) to develop a risk management plan that contains measures to protect sources of drinking water.

Here are some of the more common examples of activities that could pose a risk to drinking water:

### Residential properties:

- paving of large surfaces
- use of home heating oil
- applying large quantities of road salt
- use of failing septic systems
- use of pesticides

### Commercial/Industrial properties:

- use of dry-cleaning chemicals
- storage of PCBs and other hazardous waste
- operation of a landfill
- operation of a gas or service station
- storing paints, solvents, varnishes or glues
- use of degreasers or cleaning agents (e.g. at a mechanic's shop)
- taking of water
- changing pervious surfaces to impervious

### Agricultural properties:

- use or storage of pesticides
- use or storage of fertilizers
- operation of a fish farm
- having fields with livestock grazing or feed lots
- handling, storage or application of manure





## Building in a vulnerable area

Make sure your client checks with the municipality about any new use, business or construction proposed for the property. Development applications and planning or building permits may be subject to policies.

These can include land use planning policies such as low-impact development for stormwater management or prohibition of a new gas station. Or an application or permit could be flagged because of restricted land use policies under the local source protection plan. Flagged applications or permits need to be reviewed by the local risk management official before they can be submitted to the municipality's planning or building department.

## What if I sell and list properties in more than one area?

Policies can differ from one source protection region or area to another, as each has a local source protection plan in place to address

local needs. You'll find that each region/area in Ontario has a website listing local plan information and maps.

## Does the property have a septic system?

The Ontario Building Code requires that septic systems in certain vulnerable areas surrounding municipal drinking water sources be inspected every five years. It's important for the landowner to keep the septic tank and tile field in good working order and understand what should not be put into it, to minimize risk of health and environmental problems that can impact water sources.

## Does the property have a well?

The Drinking Water Source Protection Program does not include individual private wells. A private well owner needs to regularly sample their water to test its quality, and properly maintain their well to protect water sources.

### Resources:

- For more information, including links to local contacts, resources and local source protection plans, visit [protectingwatermatters.ca](http://protectingwatermatters.ca).
- Learn more about drinking water source protection at the Government of Ontario website: [ontario.ca/page/source-protection](http://ontario.ca/page/source-protection).
- Information on septic systems and private wells is available at [ontario.ca](http://ontario.ca).





## Have you seen this Drinking Water Protection Zone sign?

These signs are appearing across Ontario to raise awareness about the vulnerability of our municipal drinking water sources. Governments at the local and provincial level are placing signs along roadways where a pollution spill could have a negative impact on our drinking water sources.



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**SOURCE PROTECTION**  
Our Actions Matter