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Water infrastructure could be better managed: Vodden



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Kelly Vodden spoke at the Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador's (MNL) Small Towns Caucus meeting at the Glynmill Inn in Corner Brook on Wednesday, Oct. 8, 2014.

After studying rural drinking water in this province for the past year Kelly Vodden and her team have come to a number of conclusions.

A key one she said Wednesday is “we could do a better job of managing our water infrastructure.”

Vodden made that comment after she spoke at Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador's (MNL) Small Towns Caucus meeting at the Glynmill Inn in Corner Brook. The meeting was held as part of MNL's Convention and Trade Show taking place in the city over the next three days.

Vodden, an associate professor at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland, is the lead on the nearly \$140,000 research

project, a joint initiative of Memorial University of Newfoundland, Grenfell Campus and Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador that was funded by the Harris Centre through the RBC Water Research and Outreach Fund.

Vodden's presentation highlighted the results of the study and focused on the recommendations coming out of it.

The study was started in February 2013 and looked at communities with a population of

1,000 or less. Vodden said throughout the process researchers heard mixed stories from people about the quality of drinking water and the sustainability of individual drinking water systems.

But the team did identify a number of challenges and concerns it feels need to be addressed, Vodden said.

Things that came up in the findings included concerns over the aesthetics of source water — colour and taste — chlorination and disinfectant byproducts and boil order advisories.

There were also issues identified around infrastructure and operations. One particular area of concern was the training of drinking water system operators.

Vodden again said a higher number of communities than they would like to see had operators with no certification, or very little training and some even had volunteers running their water systems.

As for the asset management, Vodden said it was lacking in a lot of communities.

“There are communities that don’t have maps of their water infrastructure,” she said.

She said even though communities can make infrastructure last longer today and reduce investment requirements it won’t mean anything if the infrastructure isn’t managed better. Things like regular maintenance planning and leak detection were uncommon.

Among the recommendations presented were a need to invest more and reinvest in infrastructure, education and training for municipal leaders, staff and the public and self-reporting by municipalities on what they’ve done to comply with water permits.

Vodden said a final report on the study will be released in November.