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OMBUDSMAN RECOMMENDS IMPROVEMENTS TO DRINKING WATER SAFETY

VICTORIA – In a report released today titled *Fit to Drink: Challenges in Providing Safe Drinking Water in British Columbia*, Ombudsman Kim Carter issued 39 recommendations on how the provincial government and regional health authorities can improve the processes that ensure the safety of drinking water.

“This report identifies deficiencies that need to be addressed in a timely way so that water in all parts of the province is fit to drink,” Ms. Carter said.

The report is the product of an investigation into drinking water safety that the Ombudsman launched in November 2007, after receiving complaints about drinking water from across the province. With a particular emphasis on small water systems, the investigation focused on drinking water complaints processes, how the public is notified of drinking water safety issues, and how information about drinking water is collected and used. It involved eight public authorities: the Ministries of Health and Environment, the Office of the Provincial Health Officer and the five regional health authorities.

Key recommendations in the report include

- that the regional health authorities develop better systems for receiving and responding to complaints about drinking water
- that the Ministry of Health and the regional health authorities work together to reduce the number of boil water advisories in effect by 10 per cent per year
- that the regional health authorities provide more publicly available information about drinking water systems on their websites
- that the Ministry of Health consider expanding the number of mandatory drinking water standards
- that the health authorities increase their efforts to identify and regulate small water systems

“I am pleased that each of the authorities has committed to implementing the recommendations we directed to them, and to working together to improve drinking water safety in B.C.,” Ms. Carter said.

Special Report No. 32 is available at www.ombudsman.bc.ca.

-30-

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