



Water connects us all



CUPE / Canadian Union
of Public Employees





The Canadian Union of Public Employees, Canada's largest union, represents more than 605,000 women and men working in municipalities, health care, education, libraries, universities, social services, public utilities, transportation, emergency services and airlines.

CUPE members are proud to deliver the majority of Canada's community drinking water and wastewater services.

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Our most precious resource

Water is a precious resource and a vital public service. It gives life and health, and sustains the planet. Public drinking water and sanitation services are a human right and the lifeblood of well-functioning communities.

We're all better off with publicly owned, managed and operated water services. Public water services meet our daily needs and protect the environment.

CUPE works with community partners locally and globally. Our Water Watch coalition has more than a decade of success protecting public water in Canada. We will continue to organize at the community level to stop privatization and safeguard water from underfunding, pollution, climate change and scarcity.

Canada needs a federal water policy that protects water for communities, the planet and future generations. Internationally, Canada must keep its promise to help halve the number of people without drinking water and sanitation services by 2015.

We must act now, for water.



In the public interest

Water belongs to us all. Governments oversee water in the public interest, and must not trade, sell or export it. Public water services and resources must be governed with full public participation.

Federal, provincial and municipal governments share the responsibility of ensuring we all have affordable, reliable drinking water and sewage services. Canadian municipalities and First Nations communities are the front line providers of these vital services. They urgently need new resources to build, upgrade and operate water and wastewater systems.

Meeting growing needs and stricter wastewater and drinking water standards calls for stable, long-term infrastructure funding, as well as publicly funded water worker training programs. Increased funding will keep water rates—intended to cover the costs of water treatment, delivery and facility maintenance—affordable for people who are poor.

Let's work together to safeguard and strengthen public water services and resources.



Public works best for water

Communities, not corporations, must control water resources and services. Canada's drinking water and sewage systems are community assets, and nearly all remain in public hands. The public sector meets high quality, safety and environmental standards, delivering affordable services on a non-profit basis.

Public-private partnerships, contracting out and other forms of privatization put water at risk. When corporations finance, manage or deliver water services for profit, costs rise and local control is lost. Equal access and quality are compromised. And international trade agreements expose water services to even greater privatization threats.

Pooling public resources and expertise in public-public partnerships is a smart alternative to privatization – particularly for small and rural communities. Municipalities, other public bodies and First Nations can meet community water and wastewater needs by forging these partnerships.

Let's work together to keep Canada's water and wastewater systems public.

From source to tap

What comes out of our tap is directly connected with the health of our water sources. Governments must act to protect and conserve water, working to meet the challenges of scarcity, climate change and pollution.

Canada needs a comprehensive strategy to protect our lakes and rivers. We must safeguard our surface and groundwater from industrial exploitation, and take a precautionary approach to chemicals and other pollutants. We need decisive and bold government action to tackle the climate crisis. We also need public funding for infrastructure upgrades, to address coming floods and droughts. Conservation measures will protect water resources and reduce demand on treatment facilities, in turn reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Most Canadians enjoy excellent, highly-regulated tap water. Municipal governments must continue to build confidence in—and access to—high-quality tap water. And all governments should work to replace bottled water with tap water in public facilities.

Let's work together for responsible public stewardship of our water resources.





Creating sustainable green jobs

Public water and wastewater services create good, green jobs that protect water resources and meet basic community needs.

Well-trained workers are the key to meeting stronger standards and delivering cutting-edge services. Governments must invest in water operators and address the coming skills shortage by funding training and certification programs.

We can create new green jobs. Replacing leaky pipes is a good start. Programs to cut individual, municipal, industrial and commercial consumption are an important step. Public investment in water treatment research and technology, building retrofits, and water reclamation programs will also create sustainable jobs.

Public green jobs support local businesses and create community employment. They stimulate municipal economies, build socially-sustainable communities and protect the planet.

Let's work together to create the green jobs of tomorrow—today.



Let's work together to keep water public.

Get involved today. Visit cupe.ca/water for information and action ideas.