

## Community & Labour Action

### Water-bottler fails to win over skeptics

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Vik Kirsch, July 18, 2007, Guelph Mercury - Despite company assurances Nestlé Waters Canada wasn't taking too much water, residents of this community south of Guelph remained skeptical yesterday.

"There's a lot of water going out of this township. They're taking major quantities," Glenn Leachman said at the company's public information session yesterday at the Puslinch Community Centre in Aberfoyle.

"(I have) lots of concerns, actually," said Leachman, owner of a local Arctic Cat ATV and snowmobile dealership, who lives across Gilmour Road from Nestle's water-bottling operations.

Leachman said Nestlé is taking water at the same time local gravel pits are going deeper into the water table, raising concerns about whether residents will see water quality and quantity decline in the years ahead.

"We have great water quality in the township and we want to keep it that way," Leachman said.

Consulting engineer Steve Usher, a hydrogeologist working for Nestlé, tried to reassure residents there's no shortage of water, particularly since the company is drawing from considerably deeper groundwater levels than residents using wells. He added the aquifer, which also feeds Guelph, is large, extending for tens of kilometres.

"There's enough water," Usher said. "It's a very productive aquifer."

Nestlé bought the local bottler, Aberfoyle Springs, in 2001, at which time it was allowed to draw a maximum 1.1 million litres a day. But a subsequent two-year permit allowed it to draw up to 3.6 million. That permit expired in June, though the provincial Ministry of the Environment has given Nestlé a six-month extension.

The company is applying for a permit that would allow it to continue to draw this quantity yearly for the next half a decade at its \$250-million Aberfoyle operations, to serve primarily Ontario and Quebec markets.

It's also testing a nearby Victoria Road site to establish a second well as a backup, should the first be down occasionally for maintenance.

Further, it's applying for zoning approval to build 119,000 square feet of new warehouse space so it would no longer need to truck pallets of bottled water to rented storage space in Hamilton.

"We're not asking for any more water," company supply chain director Michel McArthur said, noting Nestlé is drawing at 90 per cent capacity today. The business is seasonal, based on demand and as a result "we always use less" than allowed, he added. It would never be the company's goal to deplete this renewable

resource, he added.

"We're all in the business of preserving our resource," McArthur said. "We're here for the long term. Our plants are not on wheels. We can't move out."

Nestlé wanted to clear the air yesterday about the company's intentions.

"My goal," president Gail Cosman said, "is to keep people informed."

She stressed the company has no further expansion plans and the proposed new warehouse, similar in storage capacity to the one in Hamilton, means fewer trucks coming and going, improving the efficiency of operations. It would be built on land purchased from neighbouring St. Lawrence Cement.

But Nestle's arrival five years ago still doesn't sit well with Maurice Thibodeau, who lives at a seniors' residence on County Road 34 in Aberfoyle that's supplied by well water.

"I don't know what their effect is on our source water," said Thibodeau, who likes to fish in Aberfoyle Creek from the back of his residence.

Don Balanoff Jr. of Waterloo, who looks after his parents' property near Nestlé's Victoria Road testing site, said it remains to be seen if the secondary well affects surface water. His parents' property, he said, has two surface springs.

"What happens if those springs dry up?" Balanoff wondered.

His wife, Connie Mayor, added Nestlé is taking a resource that belongs to all Canadians, a theme her husband picked up on.

"This is a community resource," Balanoff concurred.

And despite assurances from the company that it will only take what it's allowed, Balanoff wasn't convinced.

"I'm just being a little cynical and skeptical," Balanoff said.

To alleviate some of those concerns, president Cosman said she'll hold another public meeting this coming fall.

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