

# Water Watch Committees: the First Line of Defence for Public Water

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## What is a Water Watch committee?

Water Watch committees are the first line of defence against the privatization of water. Made up of CUPE members, Council of Canadians chapters, and community and environmental activists, Water Watch committees fight to keep water safe, clean, publicly-owned and controlled.

The priorities of each committee will vary, depending on local conditions and the nature of the local threat. In some communities, there is an immediate risk of privatization. In others, activists are working to ban the sale and purchase of bottled water in public spaces. In all communities, there is a need to protect water quality, defend public control of our water resources, and ensure adequate funding for water and wastewater treatment. Across the country, Water Watch committees will track:

- Privatization bids for municipal water services
- Water quality
- Water rates and accessibility
- Funding for water and wastewater infrastructure
- Wastewater treatment
- Water pipeline proposals
- Water withdrawals for bottled water and water export
- Threats to water habitats from development pressures or pollution
- Access to tap water in public spaces
- Bottled water contracts with public institutions

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## How do I start a Water Watch committee?

Council of Canadians chapters, CUPE Locals or District Councils can start a Water Watch committee by adopting the statement at principles (see more information below) at your meeting.

Recruit members for the committee from among your local membership, drawing in activists who have time to devote to the committee and Union sisters and brothers who haven't been active. If you have an environment committee, you will want someone from that group to participate in the Water Watch committee.

Contact your regional Council of Canadians office for materials, advice and support to get your committee rolling.

Next, reach out to others who are concerned about water issues. The CUPE Locals or District Councils in your community includes members who are concerned about the threat of water exports. Local environmental activists are concerned about water quality and control of our resources. Other allies you may want to approach include members of anti-poverty groups, women's groups and local indigenous groups.

The Water Watch Statement of Principles forms the basis of the Water Watch campaign. The principles serve as a foundation for all the Water Watch committees across the country, setting out the common cause that binds this diverse group of workers, community and environmental activists.

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### **What can Water Watch committees do?**

Again, Water Watch committee action plans will vary from one community to another. In some, they will be fighting immediate threats. In others, they'll serve as an early warning system.

The first thing to do is find out if your municipal council is considering the privatization of water or wastewater services. Talk to councillors and senior city staff. Review minutes of council and committee meetings. Keep track of visits by consultants and corporate executives who may be promoting privatization bids.

If there are no clear signs or rumours that council is considering a privatization bid, the Water Watch committee should begin a proactive campaign to protect public control of water services.

Make a presentation to municipal council on the dangers of privatization. Ask council to pass a motion supporting public ownership and operation of water and wastewater services.

If your municipality is looking at privatizing water services, then your campaign and the work of your committee will take on a different nature. An immediate plan of action is in order. You will want to reach out to community allies and put pressure on municipal councillors, exposing the risks of privatization while promoting the alternatives.

It's important to show that municipalities are under increasing financial pressures as a result of service downloading and funding cuts by the federal and provincial governments. An important element of the committee's work is to build pressure on the federal and provincial governments to provide adequate funding to expand and upgrade our water and wastewater systems. This may require that you meet with MPs or members of the provincial legislature.

Other activities might include:

- Educating members and the public about the threat of providing water for profit.
- Getting support from Labour Councils and other groups.
- Sponsoring a community event on World Water Day on March 22.
- Organizing a local "teach-in" on water for profit and water quality.
- Identifying corporate polluters and privateers.
- Promoting water conservation.
- Identifying threats to water quality.
- Promoting access to safe water for all local residents.
- Promoting bottled water bans in municipalities, school boards, local businesses and other community spaces.
- Protecting natural water habitats.
- Calling for a national water policy.
- Promoting water as a human right.
- Linking to other Water Watch committees at the regional and national level.

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### **Who do Water Watch committees target?**

Water Watch committees will be active locally, provincially and nationally, holding governments at all levels to account for protecting public control of water services and resources.

**Municipal governments** will be targeted to protect public ownership and operation of municipal water supplies. As part of this effort, we will work with municipal governments for increased funding from federal and provincial governments to upgrade and expand water and wastewater facilities.

**Provincial governments** will be lobbied to provide adequate funding for water services and waste water treatment, and to strengthen environmental regulation and enforcement.

The **federal government** will be pressured to provide a significant increase in funding for the expansion and upgrading of water and wastewater facilities. The federal government will also be pressured to adopt legislation prohibiting the bulk export of water.

Corporations that exploit water for profit and damage water quality will be targeted.

CUPE members and the public will be encouraged to conserve water and protect water quality while governments will be pressured to protect water quality and the environment.

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### **How do Water Watch committees connect?**

Send us an email at [waterwatch@canadians.org](mailto:waterwatch@canadians.org) with “Water Watch” in the subject line and we will put you in touch with other organizations or activists in your community – and across the country – who are interested in supporting this campaign. We’ll provide regular updates, share winning strategies from other communities, and help set up a national emergency response network.

The Council of Canadians and CUPE will support committees with research and communications tools.

For more information about Water Watch Committees contact:

[waterwatch@canadians.org](mailto:waterwatch@canadians.org), or visit [www.canadians.org/water](http://www.canadians.org/water)

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