

Union warns of quick fix on water

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Temporary hirings and arbitrary workload limits are evidence the province has failed to learn the lessons of the tainted water tragedy in Walkerton, the Ontario Public Service Employees Union says.

In a report focusing on the recommendations of the Walkerton inquiry, the union charges that the public service can't function properly if it's hampered by a "continued application of temporary fixes."

"We fear that once attention on the ministry is diverted, even the slim temporary re-

sources for labs, approvals, training and inspectors given during the crisis will melt away," said OPSEU president Leah Casselman.

Spokesperson John Steele said the environment ministry is committed to following all the recommendations.

Assistant deputy environment minister Micheline Riopelle has the job of coming up with an action plan and will study Casselman's suggestions, he said.

The OPSEU report, forwarded yesterday to Riopelle, says staff who handle applications for permits to take water have

been told to disregard drinking-water implications, because those would trigger a requirement for a certificate of approval, a more onerous process. Steele said he was not aware of such a directive.

The union also says that of 425 environmental officers, 99 — nearly 25 per cent — have been hired temporarily. Of 210 employees in the approvals branch, 65 are temporary hires.

And of \$240 million in funding for sewer and water infrastructure announced in August, 2000, only about \$3 million has been spent — on engineering reports.