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And not a drop to drink: A Vancouver Island subdivision shows how bad it can get when tap water is poison, not even fit for washing floors; [Final Edition]

[Barbara McLintock](#). [The Province](#). Vancouver, B.C.: [Feb 25, 2001](#). pg. A.14

Abstract (Summary)

VICTORIA - Tony Knott lives in a luxurious home in a small, but high-priced subdivision in the Victoria suburb of Central Saanich.

[George Morfitt] and health officials like [Richard Stanwick] say problems are much more likely to arise in smaller systems, such as in the **Senanus** Drive subdivision.

Color Photo: Darren Stone, for The Province / **Senanus** Drive resident Charles Goldie holds a glass of tap water from his Central Saanich home. ;

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Full Text (549 words)

(Copyright The Province 2001)

VICTORIA - Tony Knott lives in a luxurious home in a small, but high-priced subdivision in the Victoria suburb of Central Saanich.

But in one way, the Knotts' home is little better than a hovel in one of the world's poorest countries.

It has no water that's fit to drink.

Knott and his neighbours along **Senanus** Drive have been told by health authorities that even boiling the water that comes out of the taps in their homes wouldn't make it safe for drinking.

"It's gotten so bad that they've even told us it's not safe even to bathe a baby in it," Knott told The Province.

The water contains dangerous amounts of chromium and other metals, and often also carries the E. coli bacteria.

The water that comes out of the taps isn't even useful for washing the floors or the countertops because it leaves a scummy film everywhere, Knott said.

It corrodes the pipes in the house's plumbing and in water-using appliances like washing machines or dishwashers.

The water level in the aquifer that feeds the subdivision's homes gets so low

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during dry summers that in some homes there isn't even enough water to flush the toilet.

Yet only two kilometres away, top-quality city water is not only provided to homes but being poured on to farm fields.

The subdivision is in the predicament because Central Saanich council has not agreed to a plan to allow the subdivision to hook up to Greater Victoria's water system.

Councillors fear providing city water would encourage further development in an area they want to keep pristine.

They're also reluctant to contribute Central Saanich's share of infrastructure money to a project that would benefit fewer than 70 homes.

The story of the subdivision's water problems is one of the most dramatic that reveals the lack of regulation and protection of drinking water systems in B.C.

"It's horrible," Dr. Richard Stanwick, regional medical health officer, says of the subdivision's situation.

But under B.C.'s water regulations, neither Stanwick, nor any senior government official, has the authority to force municipalities to allow residents to hook up to a city system. All health authorities can do is warn residents, who may be at risk from their water, of the dangers they're facing.

"If you're not hooked up to a major city system, like Vancouver or Victoria, it's still very much a case of buyer beware," says Stanwick.

Across the province, there are more than 3,000 water systems that provide water to more than two households, according to a 1999 report from former auditor-general George Morfitt. Even major systems, like Vancouver's and Victoria's, are still installing more treatment systems to protect their residents from water-borne diseases like giardia and cryptosporidiosis.

However, Morfitt and health officials like Stanwick say problems are much more likely to arise in smaller systems, such as in the **Senanus** Drive subdivision.

That's partly because B.C. remains the only province in Canada that has no legislation to protect its groundwater.

Environment Minister Ian Waddell hopes that will change this spring, (should there be a new session of the legislature) with new water protection laws being planned by the government.

[Illustration]

Color Photo: Darren Stone, for The Province / **Senanus** Drive resident Charles Goldie holds a glass of tap water from his Central Saanich home. ;

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