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## It's time to get inspired about sewage treatment

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Richard Stanwick, the chief medical officer in the capital region, recently wrote about sewage pollution, cost and the value of treatment.

But in fairness, has he been given complete and current information?

We now have the details behind the much-parroted \$447-million cost estimate for treatment. The Capital Regional District's response to a freedom of information request shows it's based on unrecorded instructions to one consultant. It ignores resource-recovery technologies and the Conservatives' commitment to shared funding, which has been confirmed again.

Something's fishy. Why would we pay more than the \$9 per home per month that residents of Sidney and North Saanich pay for treatment through the CRD's secondary treatment plant, built in 2000 for \$20 million? Construction costs have risen, but as Victoria Mayor Alan Lowe explained in a Jan. 3 CBC interview, treatment technology is smarter now.

How smart? Core area sewage contains enough energy to run all of our 200 buses and a further 5,000 cars, renewable energy that is recovered by European cities. We can divert the three million to five million kilograms a year of grease and oil bubbling to the ocean's surface above our outfalls into biodiesel.

Anaerobic bacteria produce biogas and break down PCBs and dioxins. Modern, clean technologies convert sewage sludge into biofuels and minerals. We have the technology but lack inspiration.

Cities that treat sewage also use source control, and as Environment Canada told the CRD in 2000: "Treatment's not only more effective in reducing contaminants, it is effective immediately upon implementation and will remove a wide array of contaminants not targeted under source control."

In a 2003 Environment Canada document obtained through freedom of information, senior staff tell former Liberal MP David Anderson over 12 pages how science shows CRD's untreated sewage causes pollution and likely violates the Fisheries Act.

The 2005 Sierra Legal Defence Fund request to the Ministry of Environment shows the seabed around the outfalls is contaminated beyond B.C.'s contaminated sites regulations. It seems dilution is not the solution hoped for in the 1960s.

Surfriders are concerned when CRD reports show surface fecal coliform levels 17 times above Health Canada limits. But let's go further. Do our health interests include food? Through bioaccumulation what goes into the ocean comes back on the dinner plate.

Are we concerned about air quality and climate change? Running buses on biofuels reduces air pollution and greenhouse gases.

A 2004 CRD poll obtained through freedom of information shows 75 per cent of citizens believe dumping untreated sewage into the ocean is unacceptable. It's time to hold a design competition and invite the world's experts to show us our resource recovery options and realistic costs.

Many developing countries have better sewage treatment than Victoria and are doing their part to protect our oceans. When they visit our Sustainable Olympics in 2010 maybe we could invite them to offer a donation to Premier Gordon Campbell toward treatment here.

When we run buses and whale-watching boats on biofuels we'll replace our environmental stigma with a reputation as an innovative, thoughtful and sustainable community. It's an idea that's too good to waste.

Stephen Salter, P.Eng., is a volunteer with the Victoria Sewage Alliance.

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