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## Walkerton report lays blame for *E. coli*

TORONTO — A judge's report blamed the provincial government and two others for *E. coli* contamination that killed seven people and sickened more than 2,000 nearly two years ago in the town of Walkerton.

The report by Justice Dennis O'Connor concluded a nine-month public inquiry involving 114 witnesses into Canada's worst *E. coli* outbreak, the Associated Press (AP) reported. The findings were formally released Friday, 18 January, but much of the information was leaked earlier in the week by the Canadian Press news organization.

Flooding on 12 May 2000 washed cattle manure into a town well, which led to the pollution. O'Connor said brothers Stan and Frank Koebel lacked the training and education to manage the water supply, and lied to regulators to protect their jobs, AP said.

Walkerton's water system was overhauled at a cost of \$10 million, the news service said, and residents had to boil their tap water or rely on bottled water for almost seven months.

Police investigating the case have yet to file any criminal charges. Under the rules of the inquiry, none of O'Connor's findings or conclusions can be used as evidence in a criminal case, AP said. The report also criticized the Ontario government, saying it ignored warnings that its spending cuts could increase the possibility of water problems in the province, O'Connor said.

Ontario Premier Mike Harris, a witness in the lengthy inquiry last year, said in his testimony last year that his government would never have proceeded with the budget cuts if it was aware of a public health risk, AP reported. Harris has announced he will step down as premier in March for personal reasons.

"Walkerton was a wake-up call," Harris said in a statement Friday. "Not only for Ontario, but for municipal governments, other provinces and countries around the world. It is our job to answer the call and I believe that Ontario has and will continue to answer in

the affirmative, as should all levels of government."

Minister for the Environment Elizabeth Witmer said the report makes 28 specific recommendations, four of which have already been implemented, while implementation of another 15 recommendations is currently underway.

"But we cannot stop there ...We will continue to do everything in our power to ensure that our water is the safest and the cleanest water in North America," she said in a statement.

Bill Trudell, the lawyer for Stan and Frank Koebel, said he was pleased with the report because it doesn't lay the blame solely on the brothers, according to AP.