

Water consumption drops in capital

Even with more cruise ships in port, harbour authority drawing less water than last year

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- BY DAVE STEWART

The number of cruise ship visits may be up this year but water consumption is down, says the chairman of Charlottetown's water and sewer utility.

Coun. Eddie Rice tried to clear up what he calls a misconception among the public that the cruise ships are bleeding the capital city's water source dry.

Rice says the number of visits to Charlottetown this year is up 30 per cent — a total of 69 visits is scheduled — while the water the Charlottetown Harbour Authority is drawing has dropped between 20 and 25 per cent.

In fact, Rice says water consumption is down everywhere, even with more ships in port and more development taking place in the capital.

The city does not sell water to the cruise ships. It provides water to the harbour authority, which in turn, supplies water to all the ships that come into port, including oil tankers and gravel boats. However, not all ships that come into port take water.

"Water consumption is down (across the city) and it's down as far as the harbour authority goes," Rice said.

"I don't have the actual figure but it's down a good percentage, our project officer tells us. You cannot refuse anybody water."

Rice said not every ship that comes into port takes water and only one ship can take water at a time, the one that's actually docked.

And, Rice says the harbour authority isn't even the biggest consumer of water in the city.

"The QEH uses way more," Rice says. "The hospital needs water. I'm not blaming them. They need it to function."

Coun. Mitchell Tweel wants proof, calling on the city to release information on how much water its biggest users are drawing.

Tweel says the city can't order residents to conserve water (as it did last year) while giving others carte blanche. Last year, the city hit 98 per cent of what it is permitted under provincial regulations to draw from the Winter River watershed, its only source of water right now. That led to water restrictions last summer but the city has not brought those same restrictions in this year.

"Water restrictions did not have to be (introduced this summer) because consumption levels stayed below 95 per cent," Rice said. "We got very close to it on three different days but we did not have to introduce water restrictions. We did not exceed the 95 per cent."

The Guardian did reach out to the Winter River watershed committee but a spokesman declined immediate comment.

Tweel said he supports the cruise ship industry and what it brings to the city but added there can't be a double standard between asking residents to conserve and not divulging how much the big users draw. Tweel is also floating the idea of asking cruise ships to fill up in other ports considering Charlottetown's water situation.

Rice said that's akin to telling the ships to stay away, adding that everyone is using less water this year.

In 2011, the city welcomed 39 ships and drew more water than it did in 2012 when it had 51 ships come into port.

Rice said water consumption is down across the board.

"The issue is that everybody is saving water and everybody is trying to save water."