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Mayors call on province, feds for waste-water cash

By MICHAEL LIGHTSTONE City Hall Reporter

The impact on local taxpayers of proposed new federal waste-water rules for municipalities will be huge if Ottawa and provincial governments don't help pay the cost of infrastructure upgrades, Atlantic Canada's mayors said Thursday in Halifax.

They would like to see at least one-third of the billions of dollars of improvements that need to be done covered by Ottawa and one-third paid for by the provinces, said Halifax Mayor Peter Kelly, spokesman for the group.

Kelly said there's no way the region's municipalities can shoulder the expense themselves. He said planned regulations would cost Halifax Regional Municipality about \$2 billion over three decades.

Kelly said every municipality "has a threshold capacity of borrowing, and many of these municipalities, especially the smaller ones, are already there."

A preliminary analysis shows waste-water charges in the Halifax region could go up by \$1,000 per household a year, depending on a financing scheme yet to be put in place, he said.

"This (cost) cannot just be on the backs of our taxpayers, property-wise. It needs to be a national program" funded by the three government levels, Kelly told reporters after a city hall news conference.

The mayors are in Halifax for two days of talks covering a range of issues affecting the Atlantic region.

Municipal waste-water effluent is one of the largest pollution sources in Canadian waters, Environment Canada says. Department staffers are seeking public input on draft regulations addressing the problem.

The Atlantic mayors say they support protecting the environment but can only do so much with the public money at their disposal.

Kelly said if municipalities fail to meet the proposed new standards, they can be prosecuted under the federal Fisheries Act or other legislation.

So far, he said, there hasn't been any news out of Ottawa on a plan to bankroll the

municipalities' efforts to meet the draft regulations.

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