



August 18, 2026

The Township would like to provide an update on the status of the coloured water issue in the Cobden Drinking Water System. Residents are continuing to experience yellow, brown, or tea-coloured water and the Township would like to provide information about the cause, the actions being taken, and what residents can expect moving forward.

Why is the Water Coloured?

The discoloured water is being caused primarily by rapidly changing manganese levels and unusually high amounts of naturally occurring organic matter in Muskrat Lake, the source of Cobden's drinking water.

As part of the treatment process, chlorine is added to disinfect the water and protect public health. Chlorine can react with naturally occurring manganese and organic material present in the source water, that may give the water a yellow, brown, or tea-like appearance.

How is Manganese Removed?

At the Cobden Water Treatment Plant, manganese is removed using a treatment process that includes potassium permanganate, an oxidizing agent that converts dissolved manganese into particles that can be filtered out. The effectiveness of this process depends on carefully matching the amount of potassium permanganate to the manganese levels in the source water.

If too little potassium permanganate is added, manganese may not be fully removed, resulting in brown-coloured water. If too much potassium permanganate is added, water may develop a pink tint.

Manganese levels in Muskrat Lake have been changing rapidly, maintaining the ideal dosage has been challenging, contributing to intermittent episodes of brown-coloured water over the past weeks.

Why Is This Year Different?

Recent weather conditions, including strong winds, heavy rainfall, and temperature fluctuations, have caused increased mixing within Muskrat Lake. This mixing can significantly change the quality of raw water entering the water treatment plant.

Over the past several weeks, manganese concentrations have fluctuated dramatically, sometimes changing daily or even hourly.

In addition, recent laboratory testing of raw water samples from Muskrat Lake confirmed higher-than-normal levels of organic material. These elevated organic levels create an additional treatment challenge because the organic matter also reacts with potassium permanganate, which can produce a yellow tint in the treated water.

Ontario Clean Water Agency (OCWA) reduced potassium permanganate dosing at the end of last week to address the yellow discolouration. While this adjustment improved the yellow colour, it also reduced the effectiveness of the manganese removal, resulting in an increase in reports of brown-coloured water.

What is Happening Now?

Following the receipt of new laboratory results on Monday, local OCWA staff are working closely with OCWA's Process Optimization Team to adjust treatment processes and better manage both manganese levels and elevated organic matter in the source water.

Operations staff continue to actively monitor water quality and make adjustments as conditions change. In addition, OCWA is flushing hydrants to remove the coloured water from the distribution system.

Is My Water Safe?

Residents may continue to notice discoloured water. While the presence of coloured water is an aesthetic concern, it is safe to drink and does not pose a health risk. The water continues to meet Provincial drinking water requirements.

What should I do if I have discoloured water?

If you notice coloured water from your taps, run cold water until it clears. If the water does not clear after one hour of flushing, please contact the Township at (613) 646-2282 or submit a report on the Township's website under 'Feedback'. After hours reports can be submitted online or by calling the Townships after-hours reporting line at 613-647-3333.

How long will the discolouration last?

OCWA has not provided a definitive timeline for when the water discolouration will be fully resolved.

What can be done in the future?

In 2026, The Township secured \$4,023,212 in funding by the Province of Ontario towards the Cobden Water Treatment Plant Health & Safety Upgrades Project which 73% of the total project cost of \$5,511,250. This funding will help stabilize future water increases.

These improvements will help enhance drinking water quality and reliability by:

- Addressing manganese-related water quality concerns;
- Improving the plant's ability to manage Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs);
- Reducing the formation of Trihalomethanes (THMs);
- Replacing aging infrastructure components;
- Implementing a modern Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system, and;
- Strengthening overall treatment processes to ensure safe, reliable drinking water continues to be delivered to residents.

Additional Information:

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