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Faculty News > Shining a light on water quality

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By Chad Pawson

Look in a glass of water and you're not likely to see much – unless you're Chemistry Professor Bryan Hollebhone, that is.

Hollebone has been looking at water since 1977, with the idea to find better ways of seeing pathogens hidden inside.

"It's hard to manage water quality when you don't know what you are managing," says Hollebhone, referring to current methods. "I'm in the business of seeing... seeing what's there."

Hollebone has discovered a better, quicker, and cheaper way to test water resulting in three patents in 1996, and more recently, commercial partnerships that will help bring his handheld water testing system to market.

The device traps substances from a small sample, then uses light to identify the contents on-site in hours or even minutes.

"It's a pretty neat idea," says Hollebhone, whose real-time system will help prevent tragedies like Walkerton. "The goal was to invent a tool to find what is there before anything can happen...I feel close to the philosophy of David Suzuki in that you need to make people aware of things that need solutions, but you also have to have the tools to find those solutions."

Eco Vu Analytics will develop the market for the product while Hollebhone and Carleton continue with research and testing to refine the tool.

"I'm very pleased that this project is finally becoming coherent," he says.

There are 15 full-time and 11 part-time people employed on the project, including two from Carleton: Chemistry Professor Edward Lai, and Professor Myron Smith of Biology.

"Students are always interested in applying what they've learned in class to the real world," says Smith. "With this project, which involves many different disciplines, they will have exposure to a wide diversity of problem solving and get to come at it from an application angle."

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