

# SanEcoTec

## Ripe for IP protection

We may take water quality for granted in Canada, but there's a lot that goes into ensuring our drinking water systems, public pools, and the greenhouses that grow our food have safe water. Treating water is difficult, and there are several waste streams produced in the purifying process, including waste water and energy and chemical waste. Climate change, catastrophic weather events, and new pathogens exacerbate the challenge. But Ottawa's SanEcoTec has found a potential way to simplify the processes needed to ensure water is safe.

The company has developed a software-as-a-subscription product that not only helps manage water quality, but notifies users that a system is running sub-optimally. It then identifies the waste associated with it and tells users how that waste can be tangibly reduced.

With such an innovative product, SanEcoTec co-founders Els Vanbeckevoort and Jim Shubat wanted to make sure their intellectual property (IP) was protected. They started the process in 2011, but were not guided well by the IP agent and attorneys they engaged.

"They didn't understand the subject matter and missed the mark in clarifying the non-obvious, innovative pieces and we lost that IP subsequently," Vanbeckevoort says. "It was a disappointing costly exercise that only yielded lessons learned and a certain amount of trepidation."

The partners did subsequently find professionals who understood their processes and helped them secure their first patent in 2018. Since then, they've been working to further develop existing and new IP and recently qualified for Invest Ottawa's ElevateIP program.

"Developing a broader IP strategy was very valuable for us," Vanbeckevoort says. "The technical and the administrative people have all been helpful. They asked very good questions. From the get-go it was a great experience."

It was so good, in fact, that as a result, the company is ramping up its inbound marketing because the IP sets it apart from competitors in tangible ways. The company is also securing strategic partnerships in other regions of the world.

"We are developing credibility and a leadership role in the market space," Vanbeckevoort says. "We've been asked to speak at multiple conferences and are poised to scale our business as we reach a tipping point over the coming year."



Through Elevate IP, Vanbeckevoort and Shubat discovered there were other IPs they should protect, including a new method that is differentiates between potential pathogens and beneficial microbes in water systems. "This was a large project and we were trying to tease out the IP pieces," Vanbeckevoort says. "We're in the early stages of the patent process, and we wouldn't have gotten to this place without the support of Invest Ottawa's ElevateIP program."

Because their innovative elements are not at risk thanks to IP protection, they are able to share more widely, which she says is both exciting and commercially invaluable.

"Because of the financial support from the ElevateIP program, we were able to divert money to product development and automation and digital market readiness."

For their part, Invest Ottawa advisors clearly saw that securing its IP would allow SanEcoTec to grow and prosper.

"We could see that they had technology for combining analytics with water safety that had to be protected," says Jaipreet Bindra, IP Advisor at Invest Ottawa. "And we could also see the global commercialization potential the technology has once it is secured"

Vanbeckevoort says it's important to have IP protection in clean-tech so it can empower water operators to adopt sustainable water management practices that optimize water treatment and management processes.

"IP protection helps us to freely share, distinguish and quantify sustainability outcomes that are tangible and effectively meet clean-tech criteria," she says.

*Invest Ottawa is an ElevateIP Recipient: a national program of Innovation, Science and Economic Development in Canada, leading in intellectual property support for startups in Ontario.*



## SanEcoTec at a glance

**Founded:** 2009, with first R&D projects in 2011

**Employees:** 10

**Raised:** Just under \$2.5 million raised

**Highlights:** Winners of multiple awards such as Canada Clean 50 top project and Clean 50 leader (Els Vanbeckevoort), Water Canada Award for innovation in drinking water; multiple peer-reviewed papers published and two new patents pending in addition to the Water Talks Podcast

**Future plans:** Product development focus on waste reduction and integration of new machine learning engines, new IP development and a focus on scaling using IM automation, new sales verticals, integrator and export development

ElevateIP Recipient, a program of



Innovation, Science and  
Economic Development Canada

Innovation, Sciences et  
Développement économique Canada



## Why ElevateIP

Entrepreneurs have ideas — lots of them — but they don't always know how best to protect those ideas. ElevateIP provides the tools startups need to understand, manage and leverage their intellectual property.



**Els Vanbeckevoort**  
Co-founder and CEO, SanEcoTec

To find out more about the ElevateIP program, visit our [website](#).