N E W S R E L E A S E

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MDH issues new guidance on chemicals in some private wells, city water in East Metro, Bemidji

Updated health values offer additional protection for most vulnerable residents

MEDIA NOTE: MDH Commissioner Edward Ehlinger and program manager Jim Kelly along with MPCA Commissioner John Linc Stine and MPCA staff, will be available to take questions from media today beginning at noon (12 p.m.) via teleconference. Dial in: (855) 695-0679, conference ID:: 28150510. An operator will answer and ask for the ID number.

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) today issued updated health-based advisory values for two industrial chemicals present in groundwater in the East Metro area and in Bemidji. The updated values incorporate the latest scientific knowledge on exposure and health effects of the two chemicals, known as PFOA and PFOS. MDH scientists have updated the values to better protect developing infants and very young children.

Drinking water with PFOA or PFOS, even at levels above the updated values, does not represent an immediate health risk. The values are designed to reduce long-term health risks across the population and are based on multiple safety factors to protect the most vulnerable citizens, which makes them over-protective for most residents.

UPDATED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC WATER SUPPLIES AND PRIVATE WELLS

The updated values are health recommendations to local officials operating public water supplies and to private well owners in the affected areas. In addition, these values are used by the Minnesota Pollutions Control Agency (MPCA) and other agencies to take action that ensures that polluting entities are held accountable for clean-up and remediation of contaminated sites. The updated values are 35 parts per trillion for PFOA and 27 parts per trillion for PFOS. These values are lower than the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency value of 70 parts per trillion. The updated MDH values reflect new state-level analysis of the potential for mothers to pass along the chemicals to fetuses and nursing infants.

"Public health and environmental officials have an obligation to use the best available information to protect Minnesotans' health," Minnesota Health Commissioner Ed Ehlinger said. "As we get a better understanding of the long-term impacts of these chemicals, we need to update our guidance to enhance the protections that were in place previously."

The updated Minnesota values reflect the fact that PFCs are water soluble and do not break down in the environment. This means they can move long distances in the environment. PFCs can build up in the body over time. They also can be passed on to fetuses through the placenta and to nursing infants through breast milk.

GUIDANCE FOR PREGNANT WOMEN AND BREASTFEEDING MOMS

MDH recommends that women in the affected communities who are currently breastfeeding, and pregnant women who plan to breastfeed, should continue to do so. Breastfeeding provides

many health benefits to both mothers and infants. Pregnant women in the affected communities and those using water from affected groundwater sources to prepare infant formula may consider using bottled water or filtration to reduce PFC exposure.

SOURCES OF PFCs

PFOA and PFOS are two members of a category of chemicals called perfluorochemicals (PFCs). These chemicals were used for decades in stain repellants, non-stick cookware, and other consumer and industrial products. The 3M Company disposed of PFC-containing wastes in several disposal sites in Washington County, and the chemicals subsequently moved into the groundwater across a wide area. The groundwater is used as a source of drinking water in many East Metro communities. The Bemidji-area groundwater contamination is associated with PFCs in fire-fighting foam used at the community's airport over the years.

IMPACTED COMMUNITIES

State of Minnesota health officials have identified about 120 private wells in the East Metro area (mainly parts of Lake Elmo and Cottage Grove not served by city water) with water that exceeds the updated values. In addition, Cottage Grove, Oakdale, Woodbury, St. Paul Park and Bemidji have a number of supply wells for their public drinking water systems affected by the updated values. All affected community public drinking water systems will be able to put in place interim measures that will provide drinking water at or below the new MDH health-based guidance.

Cottage Grove may issue an administrative State of Emergency in order to manage interim measures, such as watering bans. **This is not a health emergency – the drinking water system will be able to meet the updated guidance.**

According to MDH program manager Jim Kelly, the previous guidance limited exposure to a very low level – well below the level at which most people would be expected to experience any health impacts. Recent biomonitoring data show that PFCs in East Metro residents have been dropping, and the updated values will further reduce the long-term exposure risk for people with the greatest vulnerability.

"What we're looking to do with these updated values is to limit the long-term exposure below a level that would lead to a risk of health effects in even the most vulnerable people in these communities," Kelly said. "There is no way to quickly reduce PFC levels in the body so it's important to limit how much gets into the body starting at an early age."

When updated values are issued, MDH and MPCA work with local systems and private well owners to determine how best to respond. This often includes additional private well sampling, providing filters for private well owners who may not have other options, and changes to community water supplies to reduce PFC levels. Simple filters that go on the kitchen tap work well to remove the chemicals from the water and reduce exposure. In some cases, using bottled water for drinking may be recommended until other remedies are in place.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

MDH and MPCA, along with local officials, will hold two public informational meetings in the affected areas in the Twin Cities: 6-8 p.m. June 6 at Oak-Land Junior High in Lake Elmo and 6-8 p.m. June 7 at Cottage Grove City Hall.

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For more information, contact:
Doug Schultz
Minnesota Department of Health
(651-201-4993 doug.schultzl@state.mn.us

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