DELAWARE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Division of Public Health

What Town of Blades and area residents need to know about their drinking water

Background

The Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) had worked with the US Environmental Protection Agency to determine if there was a potential for the Town of Blades drinking water wells to contain perfluorinated compounds (PFCs) due to manufacturing processes that have historically operated in the area. DNREC undertook water testing and discovered an elevated level of PFCs above EPA's established human health advisory. DNREC and the Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) began notifying the Town of Blades Feb. 8, 2018 out of an abundance of caution for residents not to drink water from the town's municipal wells.

On Feb. 9, DNREC and DPH began providing bottled water and water trucked in by the Delaware National Guard to Town of Blades and area residents for drinking and cooking. This action was taken after DNREC testing discovered the elevated level of PFCs, a large group of man-made chemicals used in industry and consumer products, in the town's wells. PFCs do not occur naturally, but are widespread in the environment and are found in people, wildlife, and fish.

Current status

DNREC has installed a carbon filtration system for the Blades water distribution system. The water treated by the new system was sampled and sent to a lab for testing to ensure Blades drinking water is below the EPA's human health advisory level. Results returned Feb. 22 showed that water flushed through carbon filtration was significantly below EPA's health advisory of 70 parts per trillion (70/ppt) – Blades water was at 3.4/ppt. A second sampling made a few days after the town's carbon filtration began showed non-detect for PFCs. Attention has now turned to private wells in the area. Through March 6, EPA had tested 44 private wells in the area, and six of 39 test results returned through that date exceeded the EPA health advisory for PFCs. DNREC and DPH contacted the homeowners and provided them with a home carbon filtration system. Another private well in the area was close enough to the EPA's health advisory level that DNREC and DPH also provided that homeowner with a home carbon filtration system. Drinking water will continue to be provided to Blades area residents until all test results are returned from EPA's ongoing sampling of private wells in the area.

Next steps

DNREC and DPH held a second public meeting March 1 at the Blades Fire Hall for further discussion of the town's drinking water and particularly focusing on private well water in the area. The meeting followed last month's announcement by the state agencies that carbon filtration had significantly lowered perfluorinated compounds (PFCs) in the Town of Blades water system below the EPA's health advisory.

Q&A's

Q. How long has DNREC known that the Town of Blades' municipal wells contained perfluorinated compounds (PFCs) at a level above the national health advisory?

A. DNREC received final results Feb. 7, 2018 about the elevated level of PFCs in Blades' drinking water.

Q. When did DNREC sample these wells before?
A. This is the first time DNREC has sampled for PFCs. These chemicals are not regulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act, therefore they are not part of the water system's routine sampling for chemicals such as lead.

Q. Why did DNREC sample the wells at this time?
A. DNREC sampled the Blades wells in coordination with EPA because of their proximity to potential sources of PFCs from historical industrial processes in the area. For the same reason, and out of an abundance of caution, DNREC also sampled the drinking water in the nearby city of Seaford – and after testing it, confirmed Feb. 19 that Seaford's public water supply is safe for drinking, cooking and other everyday use.

Q. What were the initial concentrations of PFCs from the Town of Blades water when sampled by DNREC?
A. All three municipal drinking water wells exceeded the national health advisory of combined PFOs/PFOA of 70 parts per trillion (70/ppt). These ranged from 96.2/ppt to 187.1/ppt.

Q. What response was made by DNREC and DPH to the elevated level of PFCs in Blades' public water supply?

A. DNREC and DPH began distributing alternative water to Blades and area residents February 8. A carbon filtration system was installed February 19 on Blades water system and was found by sampling to have significantly reduced PFCs to 3.4/ppt, a level acceptable for drinking, cooking, and brushing teeth. Both state agencies announced February 28 that a follow-up sampling of the Blades water supply showed non-detect for levels PFCs.

Q. How long will DNREC and DPH continue to provide an alternative source of drinking and cooking water for Blades and area residents?
A. Until test results from rom private wells sampled in the area by EPA are complete.

Q. When will I know if my water is safe for drinking, cooking and brushing teeth?
A. DNREC and DPH notified the Town of Blades that residents could begin using public water again for drinking, cooking and brushing teeth February 22 after residents had flushed their home water systems. For private wells in the area, DNREC and DPH are notifying homeowners when the results of sampling their individual wells are returned by EPA.

Q. Where can drinking water provided by DNREC and DPH for Blades area residents on private wells be picked up?
A. Water can be obtained from the Blades Town Hall, 20 West Fourth Street, from 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Q. If I'm on a private well, can I continue to bathe in, wash dishes and laundry until I receive results of my water sampling by EPA?

A. Yes.

Q. If I'm on a private well, why is my water safe to bathe in, do laundry in, and wash dishes with, but not for drinking or cooking until I get test results on possible elevated level of PFCs?

A. PFCs present a health concern when they are ingested directly into the body through drinking water containing PFCs, or through consuming foods prepared with the water. There is not a concern with bathing or washing dishes, as the compounds are not easily absorbed through the skin.

Q. What are some of the concerns affiliated with PFCs?
A. There are some health concerns, primarily associated with long-term exposures. According to the Agencies for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, the effects can include impacts on growth, learning and behavior of children, lowering a woman's chance of getting pregnant, interfering with the body's natural hormones, increasing cholesterol levels, affecting the immune system and increasing the risk of cancer. There is limited evidence of the effects, as more research is needed, but the water restrictions are being put in place to end exposures.

Q. If I am on Blades public water, how will I know that my water remains safe from PFCs?
A. DPH will work with the Town of Blades to develop a routine monitoring plan for the presence of PFCs.

Q. I have a private well. Who should I contact for information on sampling and treatment options?
A. Rick Galloway, project officer, DNREC Site Investigation & Restoration Section, 302-395-2600.

Q. Who should I call for more information on drinking water in the Blades area?
A. With environmental questions, please contact Rick Galloway, project officer, DNREC Site Investigation & Restoration Section, at 302-395-2600. For public health-related questions, please contact Jamie Mack, Division of Public Health, at 302-745-0076.

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