

Sen. Shilling: Local water contamination raises red flags

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La Crosse area health officials warn of private well contamination

LA CROSSE, WI - The issue of water quality and safety is hitting home for families in western Wisconsin as local health officials warn residents of potentially contaminated drinking water from private wells in the Towns of Onalaska and Holland. The warning follows a troubling pattern of increased groundwater contamination threatening communities across Wisconsin. These issues have grown worse in recent years as a result of increased pollution, over-pumping from high capacity wells and a sharp reduction in state water quality enforcement.

“Years of Republican budget cuts and staff reductions at the Department of Natural Resources are threatening our state’s drinking water and putting communities at risk,” said Senate Democratic Leader Jennifer Shilling (D-La Crosse). “These problems aren’t new, but they are certainly getting worse as major violations are being ignored and swept under the rug. If we don’t act to improve enforcement standards and protect access to clean drinking water, families are going to continue to face these serious health threats and economic challenges.”

A 2016 audit in Wisconsin exposed the DNR for failing to enforce clean water standards and prevent groundwater pollution. According to the audit, warnings were issued to polluters in just 33 of 558 instances which should have warranted more serious citations. Additionally, the report found DNR staff didn’t have time to fully review annual compliance reports filed by polluters and noted that only 36 of 1,900 of industrial-sized concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) were

electronically recorded.

Despite growing concerns from residents and health advocates and conservationists, insufficient pollution enforcement from the Walker administration and Attorney General's office has resulted in dangerous water contamination. Democrats have responded to concerns by pushing for more consistent enforcement measures and a sustainable management plan to protect access to clean groundwater for all Wisconsin communities.