

Gov. Evers: Announces drinking water protections for emerging health contaminants

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MILWAUKEE — Gov. Tony Evers, who declared 2019 the “Year of Clean Drinking Water” today announced the passage of two resolutions designed to protect Wisconsin’s drinking water from toxic chemicals.

As Chair of the 2019 Conference of Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers’ Leadership Summit, Gov. Evers introduced resolutions addressing lead service lines that likely contribute the greatest amount of lead to drinking water and PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances), an emerging hazard known as a “forever chemicals” because the compounds take thousands of years to degrade.

“We strongly believe that a strong environment translates into a strong economy, and that includes clean, safe water for every citizen to consume and enjoy. Unfortunately, clean water is not something available to all Wisconsinites,” Gov. Evers said. “The same way I am working to do my best to connect the dots across Wisconsin, we are also working hard to connect the dots across the Great Lakes region.”

The Great Lakes hold 90% of the United States’ supply of fresh surface water, according to the Great Lakes Commission. More than 48 million Americans and Canadians depend on the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River for drinking water.

The Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governors & Premiers PFAS Strategy Coordination Resolution focuses on PFAS. Among those substances are legacy contaminants such as PFAS, chemicals found in household products such as clothing, cooking pots, and pans, rugs and carpets as well as firefighting foams, which can lead to several health issues including liver damage and birth defects. There is growing concern about PFAS in Wisconsin, with high levels of groundwater and soil contamination found in Marinette, Wisconsin where firefighting foam products were used.

Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governors & Premiers Protecting Against Drinking Water Contaminants Resolution addresses lead service lines (a.k.a pipes). These pipes are an important source of lead in drinking water, contributing 50-75% of the total lead measured in tap water within homes. One study estimates that there are approximately 240,000 lead service lines across Wisconsin. Lead in pipes and plumbing can leach lead into drinking water, causing serious health problems, especially in children.

“Tens of thousands of people in Wisconsin are afraid to turn on their tap to drink water. That is unacceptable, and we must fix it,” Gov. Evers said. “Ensuring safe and reliable drinking water is not only fundamental to the health of our communities, but it is also a public health priority.”

The Conference of Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers unite the chief executives from Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Ontario, Pennsylvania, and Québec. The Governors and Premiers have worked together for more than 30 years as equal partners to protect, restore and grow the region’s \$6 trillion economies and protect the world’s largest system of surface fresh water. This year’s Leadership Summit is being held June 14-16, 2019, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.