

UW-Madison: Virtual symposium addresses key resource during pandemic: clean water

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MADISON – It may have made the work look a bit different, but the COVID-19 pandemic just made clean water’s importance that much clearer.

“You can’t wash your hands if you don’t have water,” says Matt Ginder-Vogel, a professor of environmental biogeochemistry at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and chair of the cross-campus research collaboration Water@UW-Madison.

And so, the spring 2020 Water@UW-Madison symposium will go on as planned – just virtually. From 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 5, researchers, legislators and state officials will discuss ways they can collaborate to safeguard clean water across Wisconsin.

The importance of access to clean water was recently put into stark relief, says Ginder-Vogel. Most water utilities halted shutoffs or late fees as the coronavirus pandemic spread and people’s finances grew strained just as they were holed up at home relying on their taps.

“Often you only think of water as something you drink, but it’s such an essential part of cleaning and so many aspects of our everyday life. Of all our essential services, water supply and water treatment might be the most critical,” he says.

The theme for the conference, called “Working Together to Address Water Challenges – UW-Madison and State Government,” was inspired by Gov. Tony Evers’ declaration of 2019 as the Year of Clean Drinking Water. The symposium will open with remarks by Chancellor Rebecca Blank and Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes.

Representatives Todd Novak and Katrina Shankland, co-chairs of the Speaker's Task Force on Water Quality, will also host a detailed Q & A on the group's work over the last year.

The rest of the conference will focus on a range of threats to clean drinking water and healthy waterways in the state. Many of these threats have made headlines both around the state and across the country. They include nitrate contamination from manure spreading and the presence of long-lasting chemicals known as PFAS from industrial sources in streams and groundwater.

STORY CONTINUES AT <https://news.wisc.edu/virtual-symposium-addresses-key-resource-during-pandemic-clean-water/>