

Midwest Environmental Advocates: Environmental and public health groups petition Dept. of Natural Resources to move forward with PFAS standards to protect groundwater

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Madison, WI—On July 1, 2022, environmental and public health groups represented by Midwest Environmental Advocates (MEA) petitioned the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to list toxic PFAS chemicals as contaminants under Wisconsin's Groundwater Law. [The petition](#) was filed by MEA on behalf of S.O.H2O and the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin.

“Nearly one million Wisconsin households with private wells rely on groundwater as their main source of drinking water,” said **MEA Staff Attorney Rob Lee**. “There is no federal law that directly protects their water. It is solely the state’s responsibility to act.”

“PFAS contamination in our groundwater is an urgent problem that requires immediate action,” said **Doug Oitzinger, a Marinette resident and a member of S.O.H2O**. “This petition gives state officials an opportunity to move quickly to protect public health.”

Filing a petition is the first step in restarting the process of developing enforceable standards for PFAS in groundwater. That process was nearing completion in February when it was abruptly ended by four members of the Natural Resources

Board (NRB) who rejected proposed groundwater standards, despite having voted to approve standards for drinking water and surface water.

The groups believe the rulemaking process can now be completed in a much shorter period of time than the previous process, which started in 2018 and ended with the NRB's vote in February. In the petition, they point to the fact that the DNR has already made necessary factual findings about PFAS and to the fact that the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently announced [updated PFAS health advisory levels for PFOA and PFOS](#).

“The Natural Resources Board chose to put politics ahead of public health when it arbitrarily set a drinking water standard three and a half times higher than the health-based recommendation and when it rejected the proposed groundwater standard altogether,” said **Jeff Lamont, a resident of Peshtigo and a member of S.O.H2O**.

“The NRB passed a drinking water standard for users of municipal water systems, but left rural families, farmers and other users of private wells without protections,” said **Debra Cronmiller, executive director of the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin**. “It shouldn't matter whether your drinking water comes from a municipal water utility or a private well—everyone deserves to be protected from these dangerous chemicals.”

MEA and the two organizations have asked the DNR to add PFOS and PFOA—two of the most widely studied types of PFAS—to the list of groundwater contaminants, along with two related substances—PFBS and GenX chemicals. If the petition is granted, the list will be forwarded to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, which will recommend health-based standards. Once those recommendations are complete, the DNR will propose rules to adopt the standards.

Although manufacturers have agreed to phase out the production of PFOA and PFOS, they persist in groundwater resources throughout the state and continue to pose a public health risk through drinking water. In the Marinette and Peshtigo area, dangerous concentrations of PFOS and PFOA have been found in private drinking water wells sampled as part of the DNR's ongoing investigations in the area. There have also been high-level detections in the Town of Campbell near La Crosse.

An enormous amount of scientific evidence links PFOA, PFOS and related

substances to severe health conditions such as kidney and testicular cancer, ulcerative colitis, thyroid disease, pregnancy-induced hypertension, decreased antibody response to vaccines, and decreased fertility.

Recent toxicological and epidemiological data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency confirms that these substances present a serious health risk. The EPA pointed to recent scientific studies when it announced earlier this month that it had dramatically lowered health advisory levels for PFOA and PFOS.