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## New Wisconsin alliance calls for immediate PFAS testing of municipal drinking water systems statewide

*Government, public health and environmental leaders join forces to urge local officials to test all public water supplies in Wisconsin for toxic 'forever chemicals'*

**MADISON, WI** – A new alliance of environmental, public health, and community leaders today announced the launch of [#PFASFree Wisconsin](#), an advocacy campaign calling on local officials across the state to immediately begin testing public water supplies for cancer-linked chemicals known as PFAS.

The launch of #PFASFree Wisconsin comes as PFAS contamination has been discovered in soil and groundwater in more than 35 communities throughout Wisconsin. Because the state does not require municipal water testing for PFAS chemicals, however, the full extent of contamination is unknown and could pose a significant health threat to residents, wildlife and the environment.

“We can no longer afford to take a ‘wait and see’ approach to PFAS in drinking water,” said **state Rep. Katrina Shankland, D-Stevens Point**. “Comprehensive drinking water testing will give us critical information on the extent of the problem so we can target resources to the communities that need help.”

Shankland, a member of the Assembly Committee on the Environment, joined public health and environmental leaders at a virtual news conference today calling on elected officials at all levels of government to take immediate steps to protect their constituents.

Known as “forever chemicals” because they don’t degrade in the environment, PFAS have been linked to serious health problems including cancer, reproductive issues, thyroid disease, immune system issues and more.

“Testing for PFAS in drinking water is a crucial first step to protect public health,” said **Dr. Beth Neary of Wisconsin Environmental Health Network**. “These chemicals persist in the environment and build up in the human body over time. Pregnant women and small children are particularly at risk.”

The chemicals in question belong to a class of synthetic compounds, called perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, found in a wide variety of manufacturing processes and consumer products such as firefighting foam, nonstick cookware, water-repellant clothing, stain resistant carpets, cleaning products and more.

Despite the health risks, most of Wisconsin’s 611 public drinking water systems have not tested for PFAS.

“Folks concerned about PFAS in their drinking water can take action today.” said **Tony Wilkin Gibart, executive director of Midwest Environmental Advocates**, which is spearheading the new #PFASFree Wisconsin campaign.

“The #PFASFree Wisconsin campaign includes a [website](#) that makes it easy for Wisconsin residents to contact water utility operators and local officials to demand testing.”

PFAS contamination can come from a number of different sources, including manufacturing facilities, wastewater treatment plants, landfills, airports and military bases where firefighting foams have been used.

In Marinette, firefighting foam manufactured by JCI/Tyco is responsible for widespread PFAS contamination.

**Doug Oitzinger, former mayor of Marinette and current city council member**, said at the news conference that while PFAS in communities like Marinette, Peshtigo and La Crosse has received a lot of attention, those aren't the only places where people should be concerned.

“Every community in Wisconsin should be testing their water for PFAS, but that is unlikely to happen any time soon unless local elected officials hear from their constituents.” Oitzinger said. “It's a test that costs about \$600. That's the price of knowing if you are drinking poisoned water.”

Democratic lawmakers recently reintroduced the CLEAR Act, a bill that would give state agencies and local governments the tools they need to respond to PFAS contamination, including funding for testing public water supplies. Similar legislation was introduced during the 2019-20 legislative session, but Republican lawmakers refused to give the bill a public hearing. Governor Evers' budget proposal also includes \$10 million annually for PFAS testing, but the proposal would need to be approved by the Republican-controlled Legislature.

Campaign organizers say local municipalities should test for PFAS regardless of the availability of state funding.

“While we support current legislative and administrative efforts to address PFAS contamination,” Wilkin Gibart said, “it will likely be months or even years before the state requires municipal water utilities to test. In the meantime, members of the public should reach out to their local officials to urge them to test immediately.”

Some communities—including Milwaukee, Madison, Marinette, Peshtigo, Rhineland, and La Crosse—have tested for PFAS, but most public water utilities in Wisconsin have not conducted comprehensive PFAS testing.

While Milwaukee's drinking water test results are below recommended health limits, other cities have decided to shut down municipal wells where PFAS contamination has been detected. Madison removed one of its municipal wells from production after the city began testing for PFAS in 2019. That well served part of District 12, represented by **Madison City Council Member Sayed Abbas**.

“As local public officials, the health and safety of our constituents should be our top priority,” said Abbas. “I have a responsibility to do everything I can to prevent exposure to PFAS and other toxic chemicals among all people and particularly at-risk low-income people and people of color in my district.”

The Town of Campbell is located on French Island between the Mississippi and Black Rivers near La Crosse. PFAS contamination has been detected in the Town of Campbell in municipal wells, private drinking water and groundwater. **Lee Donahue, a member of the Town of Campbell Board of Supervisors**, says municipal well testing is critical and that notification of neighboring communities should be required to protect public health.

“PFAS contamination in our drinking water is likely a bigger problem in Wisconsin than many of us realize. I cannot stress enough that testing is the only way to know that your drinking water is safe. If you are concerned, you need to share your concerns with your local officials.”

More than a dozen environmental and public health organizations are supporters of the #PFASFree Wisconsin campaign. Find a full list and more information about the campaign at [www.pfasfree.org](http://www.pfasfree.org).

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