Well testing kits for PFAS now available

Scientific studies show that a family of chemicals (PFAS) made to repel oil and water, such as non-stick cookware, fire retardants, and stain prevention products, cause harmful health impacts including increased cancer risks.

PFAS have emerged as one of the biggest drinking water threats facing communities. In northern Michigan—and specifically in Emmet and Charlevoix counties—the Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council is testing surface water (lakes and rivers) for the presence of PFAS. Freshwater Future, another nonprofit based in the area with a mission to ensure a healthy future for the Great Lakes region, is focusing on testing pri-

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vate wells. Freshwater Future partnered with the University of Michigan Biological Station to offer PFAS screening tests at a low cost (one quarter the cost of private labs). Test kits can be ordered on the organization's website, www.freshwaterfuture.org/services/water-testing/.

Through the well and surface water testing programs, these organizations aim to protect public health and learn more about the pervasiveness of PFAS contamination. The well-testing kit costs are being kept low, in part, due to funding support from the Charlevoix County Community Foundation and Petoskey-Harbor Springs Area Community Foundation.

“Freshwater Future wants to help people know if their water is safe to drink. By partnering with Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council, we were able to learn which lakes and streams contained PFAS this summer, so we are now able to target wells for testing around those areas,” said Jill Ryan, director at Freshwater Future.

The State of Michigan tested over 1,400 public water supplies. Data can be reviewed on Michigan.gov (search PFAS Action Response Team). As a result of the State testing, the City of Parchment in Kalamazoo County found extremely high-levels of the contaminant, possibly from a former paper plant.

While the current guidelines for protecting human health are set at 70 ppt (parts per trillion) by the U.S. EPA, the Center for Disease Control released a report finding safe levels of PFAS chemicals to be up to 10-times lower than the EPA's levels for human health.

Concerns about public health issues from PFAS have many states adopting lower standards. In April, Michigan's Department of Health and Human Services released new screening standards that are significantly lower for two of the most common types of PFAS--PFOA: 9-ppt and PFOS: 8-ppt. Michigan released draft drinking water standards for seven types of PFAS in October, which are a good step in the right direction if this begins to be implemented soon.

Exposure to PFAS chemicals have been linked to kidney and testicular cancers, ulcerative colitis, hypertension, liver and thyroid damage, high cholesterol levels, and other serious health problems. The science is still developing, but we do know that exposure is not only unsafe, but also potentially deadly over the long-term.

Because PFAS chemicals are odorless and tasteless, the only way to know if they are in drinking water is to test the water.

For more information or questions about the local testing program, please visit Freshwater Future's website, freshwaterfuture.org or contact us at 231-348-8200.