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Howard Zucker, M.D., Commissioner
New York State Department of Health
Corning Tower
Empire State Plaza,
Albany, NY 12237

March 1, 2019

Dear Commissioner Zucker,

Seneca Lake Guardian is dedicated to preserving and protecting the health of the Finger Lakes, its residents and visitors, its rural community character, and its agricultural and tourist related businesses through public education, citizen participation, engagement with decision makers, and networking with like-minded organizations.

The State response to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination in our community must be expedited. In 2017, PFAS was detected by the Department of Defense at the Seneca Army Depot, located in Romulus, NY. While PFAS contamination is a national problem, and a focus on contamination in NY has been in Hoosick Falls and Newburgh, there are clearly problems elsewhere throughout the state that require immediate attention.

These substances, found in things like Teflon, Scotch Guard, and even certain brands of dental floss, do not break down in the body and have been linked to life-threatening conditions including cancer. We believe the Depot's source comes from fire fighting foam.

Two years ago, the DEC indicated it would request that the Army perform a Remedial Investigation to determine the nature and extent of the PFAS contamination at the Seneca Army Depot. This remedial investigation would map the plume and determine if the PFAS compounds have traveled off the Depot or to the portion of the Depot designated for future farming at concentrations exceeding the health advisory level. Recent DOH sampling done on private wells around the lake confirms that the PFAS plume is moving south and south west toward Seneca Lake. Seneca Lake serves as a drinking water source for 100,000 people. Two private wells on a dairy farm to the south west tested at 40 parts per trillion (ppt), or twice the new recommended level by the State Drinking Water Council.

A site with 89,000 ppt is on the eastern boundary of the Depot toward Cayuga Lake, and one private well tested positive for low levels of PFAS; there is no possible source other than the Depot.

Additional monitoring on the former Depot property has been under negotiation between the DEC, State DOH, USEPA, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Corps' Engineering firm, Parsons Engineering since 2017. To date, there is no evidence this additional testing has been done or that the plumes have been mapped.

There are currently dairy cattle grazing and agricultural crops growing at sites of contamination on the Army Depot. The Depot is in a popular deer hunting area and Cayuga and Seneca Lakes are popular for fishing.

In other areas of contamination statewide and across the country, limitations have been drawn to prevent people from consuming deer caught within a five mile radius of an identified site, and catch and release orders have been placed on fishing. To our knowledge, no deer have been tested near the Seneca Army Depot and no fishing restrictions are in place. What's worse, the impact on cattle and crops at the Depot have not been investigated to our knowledge.

To our knowledge, the State has not informed the public of the potential risks, and even if it did, many of the people impacted are Amish, and do not have the means to access public television or other typical forms of notification.

This complete lack of information leaves our area at risk and we cannot wait any longer for the necessary remediation.

Finally, the PFAS at the Depot does not appear to be affecting Seneca Lake, the drinking water source for over 100,000 people. However, the plume is heading to the Lake, and the State should not stand by until that happens.

We ask that you do everything in your power expedite mapping of the plumes by the Army and development and implementation of remedial plans and that work commences immediately within our community to inform the public about this very serious matter.

We ask that you please communicate directly with us so that we know what is being done about this situation.

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Respectfully Submitted,
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Yvonne Taylor, Vice President
Mary Anne Kowalski, Research Director
Seneca Lake Guardian

cc: Basil Seggos, DEC Commissioner; Richard A Ball, Commissioner of Agriculture