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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: New Test Results Reveal Elevated Levels of PFAS Chemicals in Schuyler, Seneca Counties

1 message

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Seneca Lake Guardian Releases New Test Results that Reveal Elevated Levels of PFAS Chemicals in Schuyler, Seneca County

Call on Governor Cuomo to Be More Transparent and Immediately Develop a Plan to Clean up the Contamination and Protect the Public

Watkins Glen, NY- After being stonewalled by the Department of Health on whether PFAS were detected in drinking water sources near the Seneca Army Depot in Romulus, Seneca Lake Guardian independently sent test kits to the University of Michigan Biological Station Lab from different locations, including the Montour Falls, Watkins Glen and Seneca County Municipal Water Supplies along with 3 private wells in Romulus, NY. Results indicate elevated levels of PFAS compounds in each test sample.

Test Results in our area: Tests for 14 PFAS variants in Watkins Glen water registered a combined 21.0 parts per trillion, while tap water drawn from a Waterloo plant in Seneca County came in at 17.6 ppt, and water from Montour Falls registered 13.7 ppt. Water from private wells near the former Seneca Army Depot in Romulus had combined PFAS readings of 20.0 ppt, 5.0 ppt and 4.1 ppt.

“We suspected that there was a concern, and when we didn’t get any answers from the Department of Health, we did our own independent testing,” said Mary Anne Kowalski, Research Director for Seneca Lake Guardian. “We felt the need to inform the public about our findings, and will be working with other organizations and elected officials to continue educating our community and urging safer standards along with clean up”, said Kowalski.

BACKGROUND

What are PFAS? PFAS are fluorinated organic chemicals. Two PFAS chemicals, perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS) were extensively produced and are the most studied and regulated of these chemicals. Several other PFAS that are similar to PFOS and PFOA exist. These PFAS are contained in some firefighting foams used to extinguish oil and gas fires. They have also been used in a number of industrial processes and to make carpets, clothing, fabrics for furniture, paper packaging for food and other materials (e.g. non-stick cookware) that are resistant to water, grease and

stains. Because these chemicals have been used in many consumer products, most people have been exposed to them.

What health effects are associated with exposure to PFAS? EPA's 2016 Health Advisory values for PFOS and PFOA were based on studies of these substances in laboratory animals and were also informed by studies of exposed people. Overall, these studies indicate that exposure to sufficiently elevated levels of PFOA and PFOS, as well as other closely-related PFAS compounds, may cause developmental effects in fetuses during pregnancy and in breastfed infants. Effects on the thyroid, the liver, kidneys, hormone levels and the immune system have also been reported. Recent studies suggest a cancer risk may exist in people exposed to levels well below the EPA Health Advisory.

What are the recommended Limits for these contaminants? In May 2016, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a lifetime drinking water Health Advisory (HA) of 0.070 µg/L (70 parts per trillion or ppt) for any combination of PFOA and PFOS. NY State is proposing a 10 ppt limit each for PFOA and PFOS, but other states and advocates are urging even lower limits, such as 5ppt or 2ppt, which would include additional PFAS chemicals.

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Test kits are being provided for a reasonable fee through Fresh Water Future. If you are interested in testing your water, you can order your test kit here: <https://freshwaterfuture.org/services/water-testing/>

Additionally, more costly tests can be performed by certified labs. Currently PFOA and PFOS are the only chemicals for which labs are approved. These tests may cost \$400 or more.

Below is the link for information on NYS approved labs:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/kc6sris5my62j0/Laboratories%20approved%20for%20PFOA%20And%20PFOA%20by%20NYS.pdf?dl=0>

What is SLG's Position on PFAS Contamination in our area? SLG believes that the elevated test results are of great concern and that municipalities should do more testing. SLG feels that New York state's current proposed standards won't protect the public and that SLG's test results demonstrate that proposed limits need to be lower, and more chemicals with similar compositions need to be included. Seneca Lake Guardian will be working with other organizations and elected officials to inform the public about the risks and work on lowering acceptable limits. In the meantime, SLG urges the following:

1. That the Department of Health (DOH) publicly shares all test results on both public and private water supplies in the communities where the testing has taken place.
2. That the DOH confirms that individual well owners have been notified and advised on their own water risks.
3. That New York State immediately promulgate state-level drinking water standards of no more than 2ppt for PFOA and PFOS, combined.
4. That NY State identifies the source(s) of the contamination and determines a cleanup plan for impacted locations.

What can the public do to protect themselves? Boiling water will not destroy these chemicals and will increase their levels somewhat due to water evaporation. Sensitive subgroups, including pregnant women, nursing mothers and infants, can minimize their exposure by using bottled water that has been tested for PFAS for drinking, making infant formula and cooking of foods that absorb water or use a home water treatment system that is certified to remove PFAS by an independent testing group. Reducing consumption or exposure to PFAS containing products is also advisable.

For an in-depth article on SLG's findings, please go to:

<https://waterfrontonline.blog/2019/08/30/tap-water-in-watkins-glen-montour-falls-seneca-county-tests-positive-for-pfas-chemicals/>

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