

Clean Water Advocates to Cuomo: “NY is Failing to Protect its Drinking Water”

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[Zoom Recording of Press Conference Available Below](#)

Alarming pattern of delay in drinking water protection puts New Yorkers at risk

Albany – Assembly Health Committee Chair Richard Gottfried and Assembly Children and Families Chair Ellen Jaffee joined residents from impacted communities and leading environmental advocates today to call on Governor Cuomo and the NYS Department of Health to stop delaying protections for New York’s drinking water and set the most health-protective standards possible for three toxic chemicals that have polluted drinking water across the state: PFOA, PFOS, and 1,4-dioxane.

The New York Department of Health (DOH) is close to finalizing regulations begun in 2019 and promised for years before that. The new regulations will require all water systems in New York to test for these harmful chemicals and remove them from drinking water when the standards, called Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs), are exceeded. The final step in the regulatory process—a vote of approval by DOH’s Public Health and Health Planning Council (PHHPC)—has been cancelled twice. **DOH has, as of this very morning, publicly stated that the establishment of MCLs will be considered for adoption at the next scheduled PHHPC meeting on July 30.**

Advocates are continuing to urge the Department of Health to establish MCLs that are more protective of human health at a combined 2 ppt for PFOA and PFOS and 0.3 ppb for 1,4-dioxane. The advocates are joined by *several thousands* of New Yorkers across the state who also submitted comments to DOH, urging them to adopt these, more stringent drinking water standards. With advances in detection and treatment technology, as well as science indicating there is likely no safe level of exposure to these harmful chemicals, advocates are asking DOH to set drinking water standards without further delay that provide the maximum protection for all New Yorkers, including our most vulnerable residents.

Assembly Health Committee Chair Richard Gottfried said, “A full year ago, on July 8, 2019, Governor Cuomo directed the NYS Department of Health to adopt the Drinking Water Quality Council’s recommended MCLs for PFOA, PFOS and 1,4-dioxane. It should not take a year to implement when people’s health is at stake. It is unconscionable to postpone the PHHPC meeting again, especially when we know these cancer-causing chemicals compromise the immune system.”

Senator James Skoufis (D-Hudson Valley) said, “The Department of Health agreed over a year ago to implement the stricter water standards that the Drinking Water Quality Council set forth in December of 2018. It’s unacceptable that during a public health crisis we must again ask for these standards to be implemented so that New Yorkers’ health is protected. I’ll never stop fighting for our residents’ access to clean and safe water because healthy drinking water is a basic human right. DOH needs to stop pushing this off – people’s health is at stake, which is more at-risk now than ever.”

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, clean water is more important than ever,” **Assemblywoman Ellen Jaffee, Chair of the committee on children and families said.** “By not establishing Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCL) for PFOA, PFOS, and 1,4-dioxane, the NYS Department of Health is failing to keep New Yorkers safe from harmful, cancer-causing chemicals. We must do all we can to ensure that our water supply is clean and safe enough for our consumption. I urge DOH to enact MCLs for these chemicals to better protect New Yorkers water.”

“Considering the public health crisis New York State finds itself in as a result of COVID-19 – it is urgent that we adopt drinking water standards that adequately protect New Yorkers’ health,” **said Assemblymember Patricia Fahy (D – Albany).** “I was proud to help ensure that state funding would be available to facilitate installation of technology that ensures New Yorkers are protected from PFAS in their drinking water, and urge the Department of Health to adopt these standards when New Yorkers need them most. New Yorkers should feel assured that the water coming out of their faucet is clean, safe, and drinkable.”

Karen Mejia, Newburgh Councilmember and Local Progress New York Organizing Committee Member said, “As a mother and a Councilmember for the City of Newburgh, it pains me to know that many of our city’s residents, including my family, now have forever chemicals like PFAS and PFOS in their blood from years of contamination of the city’s water supply by the Department of Defense. These chemicals are making people sick, and it is of the utmost importance that the State mandate the most health-protective Maximum Contaminant Levels that ensure the safety of our residents’ drinking water as well as the proper cleanup of our water systems. Enough already, clean it up and mandate minimum contaminant levels now!”

Maureen Cunningham, senior director for clean water of Environmental Advocates NY said, “New Jersey and New Hampshire have both taken action to protect drinking water from toxic PFAS during the COVID-19 pandemic. New Yorkers deserve the same public health protections as our neighbors. We urge Governor Cuomo and the Department of Health to set the most health-protective standards possible for these cancer-causing chemicals – PFOA, PFOS and 1,4-dioxane – that have sickened people across our state. Pandemic or not, the safety of our drinking water and the health of all New Yorkers cannot wait.”

Eric Weltman, senior organizer for Food & Water Action said, “Respect science, respect nature – that’s perhaps the most important lesson from the pandemic. And it’s what we’re calling upon the Cuomo administration to do by establishing strong water quality standards for all New Yorkers. The pandemic has proven the importance of clean water, and ensuring that all New Yorkers have safe water is among Governor Cuomo’s most essential obligations. The Cuomo administration must not leave any community behind by allowing water systems to delay implementing the standards. The Cuomo administration must not delay any further in establishing the most protective safety standard that science says we can and must achieve.”

Lorey A. Zaman, NYS PTA President said, “New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers, Inc. recognizes the importance of safe drinking water to the health of all individuals, particularly children and youth, and supports strong strict water quality standards that help assure a healthy environment for ALL children, as well as the strict preservation and protection of water supplies. Moreover, we urge the New York State Department of Health to finalize the Maximum Contaminant Levels in water of harmful substances including PFOA, PFOS, and 1,4-dioxane, and to establish urgent processes for testing, informing residents and removing such pollutants in excess of MCLs from drinking water.”

Jennifer Plouffe, Hoosick Falls resident and member of NY Water Project said, “It has been almost 5 years since I moved to Hoosick Falls to discover that the municipal water supply was contaminated with a toxin called PFOA. To understand the impact on human health and wellbeing, the DOH began an initiative to allow residents to get their blood tested to see how much of this poison was still in their blood, as we know these poisons are bio-accumulative and bio-persistent; both in the environment and in the body of those who have been exposed for years. I was shocked and saddened to hear that long-term residents were getting results in the triple digits. The most vulnerable were babies and young children and the very old. About three years ago there were children being born to mothers who had PFOA in their blood in the triple digits... these mothers gave birth to babies who had elevated PFOA levels. Babies being contaminated from the blood of their mothers! This is a generational tragedy. This illustrates the need for an MCL for PFAS that are as low as possible, ideally zero, as we know this toxic chemical has a long half-life. How many more people in NY are being exposed to these toxins and how many will suffer severe health consequences as a result? It is the responsibility of the regulatory agencies to make sure they are protecting human health and wellbeing over companies’ ability to comply with new and strict MCL levels. Additionally, there should be no procrastination in enforcement. Time is of the essence; it has been more than five years since Hoosick Falls became ground zero and the perfect case study of what not to do and the need for the adoption of strict MCL levels. You have had plenty of time to make these changes. The time is now, it is time to do the right thing and protect our drinking water and our environment and most importantly our friends, family, neighbors, and future generations. We all deserve better.”

Andrea Spilka of the Southampton Town Civic Coalition said, “Here on Long Island we live above our sole source aquifer so it’s essential that we prevent contaminants from seeping into our drinking water. We need courageous and committed officials willing to take the difficult steps to establish better regulations, support more innovation and inspire the region to behave differently. We can’t afford to wait – the cost of inaction is too high.”

Ophra Wolf of the Newburgh Clean Water Project said, “New York State must take action now to protect communities like ours in Newburgh. Toxic PFAS chemicals are still flowing into our watershed and waterways, unchecked, 4 years after the pollution was discovered. PFAS toxins cause serious threats to the human immune system. Is it any accident that Newburgh has the highest rate of Covid-19 in Orange County? We are urgently in need of a sustainable, safe source of drinking water. With each passing day, our residents are at increased risk. Governor Cuomo, would you allow your children to grow up in a lethal environment like ours? We urge you and the Department of Health to establish MCLs immediately. Set them at the current scientific standard of non-detect, or 2 ppt, to protect our health and our children’s future.”

Yvonne Taylor, vice president of Seneca Lake Guardian said, “The former Seneca Army Depot is located squarely between Seneca and Cayuga Lakes, which are major sources of drinking water in our region and where the use of firefighting foam has left plumes of toxic PFAS contamination. The depot is surrounded by farms, wineries, private homes and many people in the Amish community and residents of the Finger Lakes region. The public has a right to know what is going on with emerging contaminants. Without drinking standards for these chemicals in place, the residents in our region remain in the dark about what’s in their water and unprotected.”

Liz Moran, environmental policy director for NYPIRG said, “Everyone has the basic right and expectation that their water will be safe to drink, but without drinking water standards for PFOA, PFOS, and 1,4-dioxane, New Yorkers relying on small water systems will remain in the dark about these contaminants in their drinking water. Approximately 4.3 million New Yorkers rely on drinking water that has levels of PFOA, PFOS, or 1,4-dioxane above levels considered by health experts to be safe – but that’s only where testing has been conducted in larger water systems. Over 2 million New Yorkers rely on small water systems that may not have had any testing for these contaminants. The only way to remedy this and ensure every New Yorker knows their water is safe is for the Department of Health to finally adopt MCLs for PFOA, PFOS, and 1,4-dioxane.”

Victoria Leung, Associate Staff Attorney at Riverkeeper said, “After decades of historic PFAS pollution from private corporations and government entities, such as the Department of Defense, it is time to finally hold them accountable for the harm they have done. Establishing MCLs for PFOS and PFOA is the critical first step to formally recognizing the extent of their damage, and establishing the basis for enforceable cleanup standards. We cannot let polluters evade their duty to remediate anymore due to the lack of regulation. We urge the Department of Health to fulfill its duty to protect the health of New Yorkers by setting the most protective MCLs immediately.”

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