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Press Release

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North Pole sulfolane health impact evaluation released

No negative health effects expected; caution still stressed

ANCHORAGE — Officials with the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Section of Epidemiology, Environmental Public Health Program have released their evaluation of possible health effects from sulfolane exposure from North Pole area wells.

Based on available scientific information, officials concluded that water containing detectable levels of sulfolane is safe for most household activities, such as bathing, washing clothes and dishes, and rinsing foods. They continue to recommend that North Pole residents use a water source that has no detectable level of sulfolane for growing edible plants, drinking, or other uses where the water is ultimately consumed (such as adding water to a can of soup).

“Although levels of sulfolane in people’s wells are substantially lower than those that caused subtle health effects in test animals, we cannot say with *absolute certainty* that there will not be any health effects from long-term exposure to low levels of sulfolane in drinking water, because no studies have looked at this in animals or people,” said Nim Ha, a co-author of the report.

“Flint Hills has provided a long-term alternative water supply to all North Pole residents with detectable levels of sulfolane in their well water, and we recommend that they continue to use an alternative source of water for drinking and eating. This also applies to pets and other household animals,” Ha said.

Sulfolane is an industrial solvent that was found in wells near the North Pole Flint Hills refinery in fall 2009.

The evaluation found no increase in cancer or birth defect rates for North Pole residents compared to the entire state from 1996 – 2007 (cancer), and 1996 – 2009 (birth defects).

North Pole residents and interested stakeholders with further questions about the content of this report are welcome to contact the Environmental Public Health Program at 907-269-8000.

For more information about sulfolane contamination in North Pole groundwater, go to <http://dec.alaska.gov/spar/csp/sites/north-pole-refinery/>.

For the full report, go to <http://www.epi.alaska.gov/eh/sulfolane/DHSSHealthConsultSulfolaneGroundwater.pdf>

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