



## DEC's Contaminated Groundwater Advisory

### Frequently Asked Questions

11/28/2018

The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation recently issued a Contaminated Groundwater Advisory to all property owners within the North Pole piped water expansion area where many private water wells contain sulfolane, and/or per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). The advisory assists residents in avoiding unintentional contact with, or spreading of, the chemicals.

While it is known that the spreading of pollution is not allowed under Alaska law, many may not be aware that using untreated, contaminated well water may cause the spread of pollution. Bringing impacted well water to the surface may expose people to the chemicals and/or allow them to spread onto other properties, sloughs, or ponds. In issuing this advisory, DEC is seeking the community's assistance in minimizing the future spread of these contaminants.

#### **Frequently Asked Questions regarding the Contaminated Groundwater Advisory**

While DEC continues working to protect human health and the environment, community participation is an important piece in the long-term protection of our community.

#### **Why is the Contaminated Groundwater Advisory coming out now?**

- Whenever contamination is discovered, anywhere within the State, and regardless of the chemical, Alaska's environmental laws require action to stop the spread of contamination.
  - During the initial response to any contaminant being discovered, DEC's first and foremost concern is protecting people from exposure to the contamination. In the case of groundwater contamination, protecting drinking water is the highest priority.
  - Often alternative drinking water supplies are provided as an interim, or temporary remedy while the responsible party and DEC research appropriate long-term solutions.
  - Now that a permanent alternative water supply is becoming available through the City of North Pole's water expansion, DEC is seeking community assistance in stopping future spread of contamination. This advisory is important to the long-term protection of human health and the environment.

#### **Does the Contaminated Groundwater Advisory affect me?**

- While this advisory is directed toward those residing in the City of North Pole's piped water expansion area, DEC is seeking to apply similar advisories anywhere in the State where there are known contaminated groundwater plumes.

- Even if your well water does not currently contain contamination above levels of concern, you should know that the contaminant plumes are mobile, and concentrations may change over time.

**I live in the North Pole water expansion area, what am I advised to do with my water well?**

- DEC advises eligible property owners to connect to the expanded piped water utility service.
- DEC advises against using untreated, contaminated well water after a property is eligible for connection to the water utility service
- To avoid spreading contamination to places where people or wildlife might be exposed, DEC is seeking community assistance in stopping the spread of contamination from untreated, contaminated groundwater use.

**What is DEC doing to address contaminated groundwater in the North Pole area?**

- DEC continues regulatory oversight of the former North Pole Refinery sulfolane plume monitoring. The sulfolane contamination affects many residents and is expected to remain in the groundwater for many years. The sulfolane plume continues to gradually migrate towards the north-northwest, and concentrations in water wells may change over time.
- In addition, DEC is actively investigating the recently-discovered per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in the North Pole area. Groundwater sampling is being performed both within and outside of the city’s piped water expansion area. Sample results will be shared with the community as they become available.

**Is there a penalty associated with disregarding this advisory?**

- DEC is seeking community assistance in stopping the future spread of contamination by requesting homeowners stop using untreated, contaminated water from their wells, thereby stopping releases of the chemicals from the groundwater to the surface.
- DEC is not currently planning to actively monitor the area for compliance. However, if problems become apparent, DEC will work with property owners to bring them into compliance with the advisory.

**I understand when I am connected to the city water utility service, I will not be using my well water for household purposes, but what steps should I take if I would like to continue using my well water for nonpotable purposes?**

- DEC is available to provide guidance on this question. In an abundance of caution, DEC is issuing the Contaminated Groundwater Advisory to stop the spread of contamination while working to ascertain ways in which residents may safely continue using their water wells for nonpotable purposes without adverse impacts.
- To provide useful information, the State is considering ways in which residents can continue to use their wells. Questions currently being considered include:
  - How do I determine if my well is above levels of concern?
  - If my well has been sampled by FHRA or DEC, how can I find out the results?
  - Can DEC provide guidance on how I can sample my own well? Is one sample enough or do I need more?
  - What are the levels of concern?

- If my well is outside of the sulfolane plume and has never been sampled, do I need to sample it?
- How can I treat my water if I want to use my well? Can I buy a water filter for my home? If so, which filter?

**Is financial assistance available to property owners for well testing?**

- At this time financial resources to pay for the sampling are not available.

**Can I treat my water if I want to use my well?**

- Yes, treatment is an option to remove both sulfolane and PFAS from well water. DEC is available to provide guidance on this question.

**How would using my well expose my family or spread contamination?**

- Using your well for purposes such as watering your lawn or washing your car brings contaminated water to the surface and can disperse the chemicals, allowing them to run off your property and on to uncontaminated areas or nearby surface water.

**What if I am eligible for connection to city water but do not want to hook up to city services?**

- The information in the groundwater advisory still applies to you. Once connections are available, even if you choose not to connect, DEC advises against using untreated, contaminated well water.
- If you wish to treat your well water, you may still use it, as long as the treatment removes contamination to below levels of concern.
- Connecting to city water should be beneficial to property values.

**Will exceptions be made to the Contaminated Groundwater Advisory?**

- With regards to construction, an excavation dewatering permit system already exists under Alaska authority to regulate wastewater discharges for excavations in areas of groundwater contamination.
- DEC is considering a similar system for commercial and/or residential contaminated groundwater use. There may be requirements for treatment or containment of contaminated groundwater to prevent public exposure.

**DEC is available to help property owners with the information in this advisory.**

Please call DEC in Fairbanks at 907-451-2143.

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