



Voices freshwater

2018 Series, Issue 3

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What's In This Issue:

PFAS is a new threat to our lakes, rivers, wetlands and drinking water. Learn how Freshwater Future is tackling PFAS in ways that secure and protect public health.

When communities unite, anything is possible to achieve:

- Two critical mining efforts in the Great Lakes region threaten the safety of our environment.
- Tackling lead contamination utilizing community-focused solutions.

PFAS is the New Lead

By Jill Ryan, *Freshwater Future*

Here's a story about toxic chemicals that have been used for decades, in a wide range of products. They have also been contaminating our drinking water in the Great Lakes region and across the nation. Health impacts—which include developmental delays in children—are well known, but government agencies are concealing the dangers.

Sound familiar?

If you followed the drinking water crisis in Flint and elsewhere, this story will certainly ring a bell. But this time, the toxin in question is not lead, but a group of chemical known as “PFAS”—poly- and perfluorinated alkyl substances.

PFAS are plentiful in our homes and workplaces; they are used to make non-stick cookware, stain-resistant carpeting, food packaging, fire retardants and more. These chemicals are equally ubiquitous in the environment. According to the Environmental

Working Group, more than 1,500 drinking water systems, serving up to 110 million Americans, may be contaminated with PFAS.

Earlier this year, the Trump Administration tried to stop the publication of a taxpayer-funded study by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) showing that PFAS are much more toxic than previously thought. The study, which was eventually released, documents that even small exposures to PFAS can cause serious health risks such as thyroid disease, elevated cholesterol, and higher cancer risks.

Now we know that current federal health guidelines are far too weak to protect our health. The CDC recommends exposure limits that are 10 times lower than what the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency now says is safe.

All of the states in the Great Lakes region continue to utilize the EPA's weak guidelines for PFAS ex-

Continued on page 5



PHOTO BY JIM MALEWITZ

PFAS contaminated groundwater entering Van Etten Lake, near the Wurtsmith Air Force Base in Oscoda, Michigan, forms a sticky foam ring at the shoreline. Testing of the foam in 2017 showed extremely high levels of PFAS.

Protect Your Health: Get the Facts on PFAS

Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl substances, better known as PFAS (pronounced p-fahs), are man-made chemicals that repel oil and water. Used since the 1940s for common uses such as nonstick cookware, fire retardants, flame- and water-resistant clothing, food wrappers, plumber's tape, stain prevention products, and even coatings on wires. Scientific studies link PFAS to health impacts such as cancer, thyroid disease, weakened immunity, and other health problems.

PFAS compounds are popping up in many locations, which is why more testing is needed. However, there are certain places that are far more likely, such as near airports, military bases, and current or past industrial areas.

How are we exposed to PFAS?

There are three main ways people are exposed to PFAS:

- 1) Food—chemicals used in food packaging and cookware gets into the food we eat
- 2) Air—chemicals applied to furniture and clothing get into the dust and air we breathe
- 3) Water—chemicals used in fire-fighting or by industries gets into the water we drink

What is the safe amount of PFAS in water?

There is no water quality standard yet for PFAS in water. While the current guidelines for protecting human health are set at 70 ppt by the U.S. EPA, the Center for Disease Control recently released a report finding safe levels of PFAS chemicals to be up to 10-times lower than the EPA's levels for human health.

What is Freshwater Future Doing?

We are working on several fronts to address public health, transparency, clean up, and long-term solutions. To help people know whether their drinking water has PFAS, we've launched a drinking water testing program with the University of Michigan Biological Station. For only \$60, people can have their water tested for PFAS. Our goal is to help people have access to trusted data so they can protect their health.

The testing will also help us learn more about the extent of pollution from this toxic chemical. Working collaboratively with the Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council, who will be testing for PFAS in surface water in the spring of 2019 in northern Michigan Counties, we aim to learn more about the interactions between surface and ground water.

Using what we learn, we will push for full disclosure of any information about this harmful chemical, request swift actions to clean up polluted sites, and advocate for state and federal standards that will protect public health.

About the Freshwater Future PFAS Water Test

1) How much does a test cost?

The PFAS test cost \$60. Scholarships are available upon request.

2) How do I order a test kit?

Go to www.freshwaterfuture.org/drinking_water/pfas and click on link to order kit.

3) Is the lab certified?

The University of Michigan Biological Station's lab is not certified. There are very few labs currently certified for PFAS in drinking water testing in the country. We offer a low-cost and accurate test.

4) When will I get my test results?

Your test results will be sent to you approximately two weeks after received.

5) What can I do if my water has PFAS?

If PFAS are detected in your water sample, we will provide recommended next steps with your results.

For more information on PFAS and links to the reports referenced, visit Freshwater Future's website, <https://freshwaterfuture.org/ourissues/drinking-water/pfas/>

Special thank you to the following donors and funders that allowed us to respond quickly to the PFAS issue.

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Local Groups Key to Cleaning Up Lake Erie

Algae blooms in Lake Erie have become the norm, rather than the exception. Year after year, communities around the lake are dealing with beach closures, drinking water warnings, impacts on local businesses and fisheries, and fish and bird deaths.

Cleaning up Lake Erie’s waters is a big undertaking, and one that Freshwater Future has been invested in for over five years, on both sides of the border. We have pushed federal, state and provincial governments to develop scientifically-based targets and strong action plans for reducing nutrient pollution to the lake.

The Canada-Ontario Action Plan for Lake Erie was released in early 2018—and while it doesn’t contain everything the environmental community was asking for, it provides a framework for implementing actions to clean up Lake Erie.

Moving forward, Freshwater Future Canada will continue to hold the

government accountable on implementing the plan and providing sufficient funding to support implementation, as well as advocating for closing loopholes in existing legislation.



NOAA GREAT LAKES ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH LABORATORY | LAKE ERIE HABTS BLUE-GREEN ALGAE (PHOTO FROM OHIO DNR)

In Ontario, Freshwater Future Canada will take an active role in implementing the Action Plan by advocating for the protection of critical wetlands throughout the basin, which have been identified in the Action Plan as being important to reducing phosphorus inputs to the lake. We will use our proven approach of supporting and building the capacity of grassroots, community-based organizations to not only grow their impact, but to ensure they have the resources and connections they need to strategically protect wetlands in the region.

Panel of Experts to Investigate Protection of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River

Stakeholder-Led Collaborative Strategy Receives Federal Funding

Environment and Climate Change Canada is providing \$400,000 to fund the development of a Collaborative Strategy for the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. The Strategy will propose new and innovative approaches to protection efforts and better alignment of government science, programs and investments. An independent panel with experts from across the Canadian portion of the Great Lakes and along the St. Lawrence River, including our own Tony Maas, will develop the strategy.

“This initiative presents a unique opportunity to mobilize diverse expertise to protect and restore the health of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. It holds great potential for new partnerships and for increased investments to address the increasingly complex challenges we are facing across the region.” said Maas of the project.

The four key challenges the strategy will focus on are in sync with Freshwater Future issues of concern and include:

- 1) Climate Change
- 2) Toxics and other harmful pollutants
- 3) Nutrients
- 4) Beaches and bacteriological contaminant



Tony Maas from Freshwater Future, is a member of the panel to develop a Canadian Strategy to restore the Great Lakes.

Over the next 18-months process, the independent panel will be advised by Indigenous organizations, stakeholders representing a cross-section of industrial, agricultural, maritime, municipal, recreational, fishery and environmental interests, and other academic and scientific experts. For more information visit, www.freshwaterfuturecanada.ca

Using the Power of Partnerships to Address Drinking Water Issues and Threats

Whether it is finding solutions to remove contaminants from drinking water or preventing pollution, partnerships allow us to do so much more. We hope you'll enjoy these highlights of people working together.



Flint, Michigan

This past summer, Freshwater Future worked with our partners Flint Development Center, Genesee County Hispanic and Latino Collaborative, Flint Neighborhoods United, and University of Michigan Biological Station to launch a Community Youth Water Testing Program. Fifteen young people from the Flint community learned about lead exposure to humans, water quality, and trained on how to properly collect water samples for scientific analysis. The teens collected more than 150 samples from residents and community centers, and Flint City Hall.

Some of the more interesting results learned from the data showed that filters are effective at reducing lead. Unfortunately, 40% of the homes did not have filters or working filters. Our partner, Flint Neighborhoods United is working to correct this through peer education on filter use and maintenance. This successful endeavor has helped residents access trusted information about the quality of their water.

Next Steps: We believe that all Flint residents deserve access to water testing from a trusted source.

The next step is to build and open a full-time scientific water testing lab. Based out of the Flint Development Center, the Flint Community Lab will be operated by Flint residents and provide Flint with:

- A trusted source of water testing services for Flint's 30,000 homes
- Access to sound information about the safety of their water
- A way for Flint youth to lead the way out of the Flint Water Crisis

A fundraising campaign is on-going to raise \$500,000 to update the building and outfit the Flint Community Lab to offer lead testing for Flint residents. This lab will also provide opportunities for job training programs, connections to lead-related resources, entrepreneurial approaches and more.



Detroit Public School students are testing homes for lead and learning about water safety, management, and policy.

Detroit, Michigan

When test results from the Detroit Public Schools Community District revealed high lead levels in several schools, the District shut-off water across the entire district. Building on our experience in Flint, Freshwater Future partnered with We The People of Detroit to conduct a water testing program featuring teens from Detroit. Eight students, all from local Detroit Public Schools, signed up over 110 Detroit residents interested in having their water tested, received training and collected samples from homes.

Next Steps: The students will participate in policy discussions around needed water policy to address public health. There are also long-term goals of exposing teens to advocacy and interest in water career pathways leading to in-demand fields of water quality, conservation, water infrastructure, and water rights. The leadership of the young people in Detroit, We The People of Detroit Co-Founder and CEO, Monica Lewis-Patrick says she hopes it will lead to a community research lab similar to that in Flint! Monica shared, "We would like to develop our own mobile lab to increase awareness and

“We Become the Solutions in Our Own Crises!”

Grace Lee Boggs

knowledge of water issues and to advance student exposure to the STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) learning opportunities that a community lab can bring.”

Monica Lewis Patrick from We the People Detroit stated that her hope for this project is it will be a transformative experience for the youth leaders of WPD and the adult allies that participated, igniting each individual's ability to be an agent of change and when we come together, or as Grace Lee Boggs said, “We Become the Solutions in Our Own Crises!”

Benton Harbor, Michigan

In 2015, lead and copper compliance tests in Benton Harbor, Michigan looked good. Not so in 2018, when testing results found multiple homes above the federal compliance standard of 15 ppb of lead. When Reverend Edward Pinkney, Benton Harbor, heard about our Flint program he reached out for help organizing similar water testing efforts in his community to learn more about the lead levels in his community. We partnered with him to collect and analyze water from 40 homes. Results of the testing have been shared with the homeowners, and we are now helping community members talk with their officials to determine what changed between 2015 and 2018 to increase the lead.

Because of the generous support of our donors, we have been able to conduct affordable water testing and deliver results for over 150 homes! The power of these incredible partnerships have created sensible and realistic solutions to some big water issues facing Michigan. With aging infrastructure, the emergence of PFAS over the last decade, and rapid changes in global climate, protecting public health and the Great Lakes creates opportunities to form necessary problem-solving to benefit communities we serve.

Next Steps: Filters are a necessary tool for controlling lead exposure via tap water. Freshwater Future is working with Rev. Pinkey to access resources that can bring filters to the residents of Benton Harbor while removing barriers of access.

Because of the generous support of our donors, we have been able to conduct affordable water testing for Great Lakes residents! The power of these incredible partnerships has created sensible and realistic solutions to some big water issues facing Michigan. For more information on any of these programs, please feel free to reach out to staff or visit our website, www.freshwaterfuture.org

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PFAS is the New Lead (continued from page 1)

posure, rather than the more stringent limit recommended by the CDC. Canada's drinking water standard is significantly higher than 70 ppt. A handful of states—including California, Vermont and New Jersey—have established stricter standards. But why should kids in Kalamazoo be exposed to higher levels of PFAS than kids in Sacramento? Instead of a piecemeal approach, we need a national standard for PFAS in drinking water.

Trump's EPA is focused on rolling back environmental protections, so it's not likely to act on PFAS. That's why we need Congress to require enforceable national standards for these chemicals, based on the best available science. Congress must also provide funding and assistance

to states for cleanup. Until such standards are in place, protections at the state level are needed either through legislative action or agency rulemaking.

We know what will happen if our leaders fail to act. The people of Flint were poisoned because both state and federal governments took too long to acknowledge and address the problem. The cost, in human health and wellbeing, is impossible to calculate.

Now, the same story is playing out with PFAS, as health warnings are ignored or concealed. If our leaders commit to address the PFAS crisis now, this story can have a much happier ending.



Polymet Permit Granted: Minnesota Mine One Step Closer to Reality

An open pit mine in north east Minnesota received permit approval from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources in early November. Poly Met Mining, Inc.'s (Poly-Met's) proposed NorthMet mining project in northeast Minnesota intends to operate for 20-years to mine copper, nickel, cobalt and precious metals.

However, the NorthMet project still requires water and air quality permits from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and a wetlands permit from the Army Corps of Engineers, in addition to other local permits and approvals.

There are also several legal hurdles before the mining company can begin construction, including a land swap of 6,650 acres of federal

land. On December 3, several environmental organizations, including WaterLegacy, a Freshwater Future grant recipient, filed a lawsuit with the Minnesota Court of Appeals to contest two of the permits for the mine construction.

If the mine moves forward it will be located in the headwaters of the largest U.S. tributary to Lake Superior, in Ojibwe/Chippewa Ceded Territories, and upstream of drinking water. Freshwater Future believes the location of this proposed mine makes it unsuitable for mining, and hopes the Army Corps of Engineers and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency will protect Lake Superior and people from this imminent threat.

Residents Vote to Keep Mining Off Public Land

Wisconsin voters in Oneida County recently voted to reject a mining proposal in the town of Lynne by 62%. Residents worked tirelessly, using grassroots efforts to push back against a ballot referendum allowing publicly owned land in Lynne Township to be used for a mining project. The advocacy also saw a spike in voter participation in last month's mid-term election.

Using strong voter education, editorials, ads, and various marketing tactics, the concerned citizens of Oneida County have made their voice heard! This, after the state legislature overturned Wisconsin's progressive "prove it first" law requiring sulfide mines to show they could operate without polluting nearby waters.



Welcome! Izzy Marrah, Policy Program Associate

Izzy Marrah will be conducting research, tracking policies and help us to engage residents throughout the Great Lakes region on policy actions. Prior to joining Freshwater Future, Izzy worked as a conservation professional for three years. She served as a research technician for an engineering group, as a conservation education presenter at Walt Disney World, and managed a sustainability blog at her alma mater. Izzy is the founder of the student organization, Sort-it-Out, which promotes recycling and proper waste disposal in the Blacksburg community. Izzy received her B.S. in Environmental Science: Water Quality and Science, from Virginia Tech and is excited to relocate from the Blue Ridge to the Great Lakes.



Freshwater Voices is a joint production of Freshwater Future, a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization and Freshwater Future Canada, a registered Canadian charity.

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