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NRB takes modest step to protect families from PFAS contamination, leaves out rural Wisconsinites

Today the Natural Resources Board voted on PFAS standards recommended by the DNR for drinking water, groundwater and surface water. Here is a statement from Clean Wisconsin Water Program Director Scott Laeser:

“Everyone in Wisconsin has a right to drink clean water and eat the fish they catch. Unfortunately, many can’t because of PFAS pollution. The Natural Resource Board’s action today to approve surface water and modified drinking water standards is an incomplete but important step down the long road we must all walk together to fix this mess. But by voting down groundwater standards, the board failed to protect the tens of thousands of Wisconsin rural families who draw their water from private wells. The drinking water rule passed by the NRB today will only apply to municipal water systems.

The vote also showed a discouraging distrust of science among some NRB members, who sought to discredit the work of experts at the Department of Health Services and successfully raised the drinking water limit to a combined 70 parts per trillion, more than three times higher than the recommendation from public health officials.

When board members amended the DNR’s proposed drinking water standards, they fell back on a familiar playbook, claiming scientific uncertainties warranted weaker standards. The standards they passed will lead to widespread testing but don’t offer the public health protections the latest science clearly indicates are warranted and Wisconsin families deserve.

Today, Board Member Fred Prehn’s continuing abuse of power led to both bad decisions on groundwater standards and insulting behavior, conduct unbecoming of a public official, elected or not. As long as Prehn remains in this illegitimate role on the board, more bad decisions, and behavior, surely lie ahead. Wisconsin families will continue to suffer as a consequence.

Make no mistake, the standards that did pass are desperately needed in Wisconsin. Widespread testing for these harmful ‘forever’ chemicals is overdue, and Wisconsin has a historic opportunity to use tens of millions of federal dollars to help communities with PFAS pollution address it.
The proposed rules must still be signed by Governor Evers and make their way through the approval process in the Legislature before they ultimately help Wisconsin families. Clean Wisconsin will work to support their approval every step of the way.

Wisconsin joins 16 other states including Minnesota, Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania in taking this first action to protect families from PFAS pollution. It will be a long road ahead for all of us, but we are ready to walk that road together.”

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On behalf of its more than 30,000 members, supporters and its coalition partners,
Clean Wisconsin protects and preserves Wisconsin's clean air, water and natural heritage.