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Wisconsin Must Move Forward Now to Protect Families from “Forever Chemicals” *State on the verge of implementing PFAS regulations next year*

This week the Biden Administration announced plans to combat PFAS pollution by taking action to develop a new national testing strategy, pursue drinking water regulations, and accelerate pollution cleanup.

The announcement comes after years of delay by the EPA to address PFAS contamination. The harmful chemicals were first produced in the 1940s and have been widely used in products like Teflon cookware, food wrappers, stain and water-resistant clothing, and firefighting foam. PFAS have earned the nickname “forever chemicals” because they never break down in the environment.

“These federal actions are a welcome addition to the efforts already put forth by Governor Evers and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Like those actions already announced in Wisconsin, the EPA will set drinking water standards to protect public health, increase water testing, work to reduce PFAS pollution from continuing to enter our water, and invest in cleanup efforts,” said Clean Wisconsin Water Program Director Scott Laeser.

PFAS are not regulated by the federal government or in the state of Wisconsin, but the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is working to change that. The agency has spent the last several years working to establish water quality standards that would help protect Wisconsinites from PFAS pollution. The first regulations in Wisconsin could go into effect next spring, but they must be approved by the legislature.

“Wisconsin families need legislative leaders to work together with the Governor to provide badly needed resources to the Department of Natural Resources and affected communities around Wisconsin to address PFAS pollution,” Laeser said. “It is time the legislature prioritizes people and public health rather than powerful industry interests standing in the way of meaningful action.”

PFAS chemicals have contaminated drinking water at dozens of sites across Wisconsin, forcing families to buy bottled water for drinking, cooking, even brushing their teeth. Laeser says

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addressing widespread contamination in our state will take aggressive action from every level of government.

“We need the Legislature to pass the CLEAR Act, a comprehensive bill to give the state the same tools EPA will deploy so they can work together to protect our water resources, and we need them to approve the drinking water standards the DNR is developing so the state can begin to clean up the PFAS pollution already out there and prevent more from occurring. The CLEAR Act has yet to receive a public hearing despite its introduction in the legislature nearly four months ago,” he said.

Even if new Federal Safe Drinking Water Act regulations are eventually established and put into effect, about a third of Wisconsinites will still be unprotected from PFAS in their water supplies. Many rural residents get their water from private wells, which are not covered under the Safe Drinking Water Act, so Laeser says it is imperative the state move forward with the proposed water quality standards to protect public health in rural communities.

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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.*

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