The NYS Departments of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and Health (DOH), working with the Rensselaer County Department of Health (RCDOH), are providing this community update to share progress on the agencies’ efforts to ensure the protection of drinking water in Poestenkill, and ongoing efforts to identify a potential source of contamination. These efforts began immediately after public water supply sampling at the Algonquin Middle School detected the emerging contaminants per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), specifically perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), at levels slightly above New York State’s maximum contaminant level (MCL) standards for public drinking water.

**NY’s Stringent Drinking Water Standards**

New York’s MCLs were developed for public water supplies but are also used as guidance when evaluating private well data. The MCLs are highly protective and among the most stringent PFAS standards in the country, much lower than the current federal drinking water health advisory level for PFOA and PFOS of 70 parts per trillion (ppt); New York’s MCL for these emerging contaminants is 10 ppt.

With the MCLs in place, DEC and DOH are working together as public water supplies, including schools, fulfill State requirements to proactively sample for emerging contaminants perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS), and 1,4-dioxane.

New York’s relatively new and nation-leading efforts to protect communities from these emerging contaminants draw from the State’s experiences addressing water contamination challenges in communities like Newburgh, Hoosick Falls and several areas of Long Island. In addition, to further investigate potential contamination of water supplies, DEC and DOH are investigating groundwater at new and legacy State Superfund and Brownfield Cleanup Program sites and landfills, including the closed Poestenkill landfill.

Whenever testing of these water supplies demonstrates an exceedance of the State’s MCLs for emerging contaminants, DEC and DOH work with local health departments to evaluate community exposures and investigate the source of these exposures. DEC and DOH then launch, with partners including county departments of health, a review of potential sources. When sources are identified, the State undertakes comprehensive investigations to determine the nature and extent of contamination. DOH and local health departments work with public water suppliers to mitigate risk, such as providing alternate water supplies and establish timetables of compliance with MCLs.

**Algonquin Middle School: Discovery of PFAS and Prevention of Exposure**

Algonquin Middle School, located near the intersection of Routes 66 and 351 in the Town of Poestenkill, is
served by two water supply wells (Well #1 and Well #2) located on the property.

As required by the State’s new public water supply drinking water regulations, initial sampling for PFOA and PFOS in the school’s water supply wells was conducted on January 7, 2021. Results showed levels of 13 parts per trillion (ppt) of PFOA in both wells on school grounds, exceeding New York’s stringent MCL of 10 ppt. Out of an abundance of caution, after reviewing results with RCDOH, the Averill Park School District (APSD) shut off drinking water fountains at the school and began providing bottled water to ensure students and staff were not exposed to contamination while confirmation samples were being collected.

The public water supply wells were retested on February 1, 2021, and results indicated that PFOA was detected in both wells at 12 ppt. PFOS, another PFAS, was also detected but below its MCL of 10 ppt. The school is currently working to install a granular activated carbon (GAC) system to treat the drinking water.

Protecting Poestenkill’s Drinking Water

DEC and DOH are dedicated to ensuring that all area residents have access to clean drinking water and are coordinating with the RCDOH to oversee sampling private wells in the area and providing an alternate water supply if levels are detected above public drinking water standards.

RCDOH began coordinating with DOH and DEC in February 2021 to gather information on private wells and potential sources of PFAS in the area and to develop a private well sampling plan to assess and take action to address any potential exposure to contamination. Letters requesting permission to begin sampling nearby private wells were sent to property owners in June 2021, and, with property owners’ consent, RCDOH began sampling at 10 nearby private wells in August 2021. PFOA or PFOS was detected in two of the sampled private wells, slightly above the State’s public drinking water standards. The

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**TIMELINE**

In 2021, DEC and DOH undertook the following actions with RCDOH to address the detections of emerging contaminants:

**January**
- Averill Park School District collects samples for PFOA, PFOS, 1,4-Dioxane as required by NYS.
- Sample results received by RCDOH and APSD:
  - Call with State DOH and APSD to discuss response to prevent exposure.
  - Directed APSD to collect confirmation samples.
  - APSD opts to switch over to bottled water and sends notice to parents.

**February**
- Confirmation samples collected and results received by RCDOH and APSD.
- Conference call with school administration and RCDOH. State DEC and DOH engaged to explore community sampling.

**March**
- Start of the collection of well log data and current and historical activities in the area.
- School district issues updated notice to parents.

**April**
- Based on information collected, including surrounding property uses (present and historical), State and County develop a community sampling program.

**May**
- Application received from APSD for water treatment facility at Algonquin school.

**June**
- Letters sent to designated property owners.

**July**
- All property owners accepting sampling respond, and lab kits are ordered.

**August**
- Samples collected, results received by RCDOH, and homeowners contacted.
- Sample summary provided to County Executive’s office and Town for public release, and bottled water provided to property owners with detections above MCL.

**September**
- Round 2 sampling request letters sent.
- Expanded drinking water sampling launching in the Area of Interest.
remaining 8 private wells did not show PFAS detections above the MCLs. Seven other private wells were tested in late September and results are pending.

DOH determined that the concentrations of PFAS detected in this community thus far do not pose a significant health risk and are well below levels of PFOA or PFOS associated with health effects. However, out of an abundance of caution DOH advises to minimize exposure to the extent possible when drinking water standards are exceeded. Accordingly, RCDOH and DEC provided bottled water to residences whose results were above the MCL. Subsequently, DEC installed Point-of-Entry-Treatment systems (or POETs) in these locations to filter out PFAS and provide clean drinking water on a longer-term basis. DEC will maintain these systems for as long as necessary to prevent potential exposure to contamination.

Additional Private Well Sampling

DEC and DOH are working with RCDOH to expand private well sampling, including acting to address exposures whenever necessary. The agencies are using a science-based phased approach that targets the closest potentially affected wells and helps determine the extent of private well contamination. This approach identifies an “Area of Interest” comprised of drinking water sources that draw from groundwater.

RCDOH, DOH and DEC are identifying private wells in this area and offering sampling for the contaminants detected in the Algonquin Middle School wells. To date, the agencies have identified 22 wells for sampling, requested access from all the owners to conduct sampling, and completed sampling at 17 wells. Of the ten homes where data has been received, no further action is needed for seven homes, one well will be resampled, and POETs have been installed in two homes.

Ongoing Community Engagement

All residents within the Area of Interest will be invited to participate in sampling by mail and/or door-to-door outreach. If a resident in the Area of Interest has not responded and is interested in sampling, the resident may reach out to the RCDOH project contacts located on the final page of this document. Sampling results will be provided to property owners.

DEC, DOH, and RCDOH will continue to keep the community informed about area-wide activities throughout the process and will host a public meeting to brief the community on findings and planned activities at a meeting once the next round of private well results within the Area of Interest is received.

DEC SOURCE INVESTIGATION

DEC is working closely with DOH, Rensselaer County, and the town of Poestenkill to conduct a comprehensive investigation of any potential sources for the low-level PFAS contamination in the groundwater at and around Algonquin Middle School.

Town of Poestenkill Landfill

The Poestenkill Landfill was a municipally owned and operated solid waste disposal site in operation from January 1967 through March 1989. The landfill was later capped and certified closed in March 1993.

DEC’s investigation will help identify any concentrations of emerging contaminants that exceed DOH guidelines and evaluate any drinking water sources affected by the landfill. DEC’s Division of Materials Management (DMM) is planning to perform groundwater sampling at the Poestenkill Landfill this month to evaluate the presence of PFAS and other substances in groundwater,
and other media as needed. Results are expected within approximately 60 days of sampling.

**Comprehensive Assessments of Other Potential Sources**

DEC, with assistance from DOH and RCDOH, continues to also review available data and obtain additional information regarding current and historical commercial activities in the area around the Algonquin Middle School that could potentially be contributing to the PFAS contamination. There are at least four commercial properties within a mile of the Algonquin Middle School Area of Interest that are being evaluated for potential use or disposal of PFAS-containing material. Other manufacturing facilities further from the school but with potential connections to PFAS use are also being evaluated for potential impacts to the Algonquin Area.

DEC is planning to install groundwater monitoring wells near the school to assess groundwater flow direction and PFAS occurrence in the area to assist in identifying potential sources. DEC will also be assessing whether past activities that took place at the school could be a source of groundwater contamination. Information on these and other potential sources will be discussed at the next community meeting.

**WHERE TO FIND INFORMATION**

**AGENCY FOR TOXIC SUBSTANCES AND DISEASE REGISTRY FACT SHEETS**
https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfas/

**PFAS INTERSTATE TECHNOLOGY AND REGULATORY COUNCIL (ITRC) FACT SHEETS ON PFAS**
https://pfas-1.itrcweb.org/fact-sheets/

**NEXT STEPS**

RCDOH, DEC and DOH will continue to implement the currently planned private well sampling as well as evaluate the need for and oversee any additional private well sampling, including taking actions to address exposures.

DEC will work with the owners of properties in the area and conduct investigations as appropriate. At this time, DEC has not identified a potential source of the detections of emerging contaminants impacting groundwater at the Algonquin Middle School's water supply or private drinking water supplies in the area, and additional field activities are being developed and implemented. DEC and DOH will continue to keep the community informed throughout the process.

Sign up to receive updates by email: www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/61092.html

**WHO TO CONTACT**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION**
Susan Edwards (518) 402-9779
Susan.Edwards@dec.ny.gov

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**
Justin Deming (518) 402-7882
Justin.Deming@health.ny.gov

**RENSSELAER COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**
Rich Elder (518) 270-2632
RElder@rensco.com