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Subject Pioneer Press - Sunday

This article appeared in today's Pioneer Press. 3M was not contacted for this story.

Dakota And Washington Counties / Is the water safe to drink?

Politics and daily life have changed after chemical discoveries

BY BOB SHAW

Pioneer Press

Bonnie Saul doesn't trust her water anymore.

In January, she heard about a new contaminant found in drinking water from Lake Elmo to Hastings — including Newport, where she lives. So now she lugs 5-gallon bottles of water into her house for drinking, cooking and even making ice.

She's angry at whoever is responsible — but she's not sure who that is. "Someone has to do something with those people who say, 'OK, we are God and we can do what we want,'" Saul said.

Saul is an extreme example — most area water drinkers have not changed their habits, and state health officials are not recommending people in the affected areas avoid tap water. Officials say the pollutant — PFBA, or perfluorobutanoic acid — poses no short-term health threat; its long-term effects haven't been studied.

But as traces of it seep into the water in Washington and Dakota counties, the impact is seeping into politics, advertising and the daily lives of some residents:

- Rep. Katie Sieben, DFL-Newport, criticized the state Department of Health for a lack of "leadership," which the department denies. Sieben said she is writing legislation to test the level of PFCs in the bodies of volunteers, and another bill to get the department to act more quickly when notifying the public about health hazards.

**Exhibit
2130**

State of Minnesota v. 3M Co.,
Court File No. 27-CV-10-28862

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- Water-filter installers have seen an uptick in business and are adjusting advertising because of the recent news.
- 3M officials are scrambling to follow an order from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency to come up with plans to monitor the spread of PFBA.

Much of the controversy hinges on one question: How dangerous is this stuff?

In large doses, the chemical is toxic to mice, in which it has caused liver and thyroid problems. It's one of a family of chemicals called PFCs, or perfluorochemicals, which have been made by 3M Co. for fire retardants, stain repellants and other uses.

It is believed the chemicals are coming from sites in Lake Elmo, Oakdale and Woodbury.

But 3M officials say the doses in the water are small. About 0.5 parts per billion has been detected in Woodbury water — the equivalent of one second in 64 years.

They say — and no one has disputed — that PFCs have never been shown harmful to humans in any dose.

But not knowing for sure is what irritates some Washington County residents, including Sieben.

"I have real frustration with this," she said. "There certainly needs to be more leadership from the Department of Health. The ambiguity they are giving out is disconcerting."

She criticized officials for setting an allowable limit for other PFCs in drinking water at 0.5 ppb but at 1 ppb for PFBA. "We don't want to be alarmist here, but it is incumbent on the Department of Health to take a cautionary approach," said Sieben.

Officials admitted they have been ambiguous but say that's because the facts are ambiguous.

Although the public has a great hunger for information, science hasn't yet provided answers, said John Linc Stine, director of the department's Environmental Health Division.

"I believe we are showing leadership," said Stine, citing the series of public information meetings the department is holding and its ongoing water testing.

Officials didn't test for PFBA in water until last year, he said, because there was no test available for it before that.

"Technology is evolving every day," Stine said. It's possible, he said, that the PFBA has been in the water for years and scientists were not able to test for it.

He said the allowable level of PFBA was set at 1 ppb because it is less likely to accumulate in the human body and so is presumably less toxic. As more information is available this year, he said, it is possible the department could change those acceptable levels.

Meanwhile, 3M officials were scrambling to obey an order from the MPCA, which has set a Thursday deadline for a draft plan to monitor area drinking water with "sentinel wells" — scattered wells that could assess the spread of the PFBA.

And the MPCA has set a March 2 deadline for 3M to develop a plan to manage quarterly water tests in homes and wells in the area and to check for other possible sources of the pollution.

The water-filtration industry has seen a slight increase in business since the news of the new pollution emerged in January. Jon Lund, manager of the Anoka/Forest Lake region for EcoWater Systems, said the maker of water filtration systems has had "seven or eight" calls related to

removing PFBA from household water.

"They ask if they can remove (PFBA). That is the No. 1 question," said Lund. "Water is like gold — a very precious commodity. It's important for your pets, your house plants, yourself."

Marty Christiansen is sales manager for Whirlpool Central Water Filtration Systems, a new \$400 product that filters water for an entire house.

When his company was planning its advertising for the year, he said, he wasn't sure if it was going to advertise in the Twin Cities. After the news of the new pollution, he said, the decision was easier: The ads go up in the spring.

They will not mention PFBA or any of the related chemicals. "We are not saying use this product or you won't be safe. We are not ambulance chasers," Christiansen said.

Saul, the Newport woman who switched to bottled water, wasn't comforted by talk that the traces of PFBA in her community's water might not be harmful.

Saul also has been giving her dog bottled water to drink. About a week ago, she said, she put down a bowl of tap water. "She walked away from it and looked at me," said Saul.

Then Saul put down a bowl filled with bottled water, "and she drank and drank," Saul said. "This proves even a dog won't drink it."

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If You Go

State officials have set a series of meetings to discuss water quality in Washington and Dakota counties.

The next is in Hastings at City Hall, 101 Fourth St. E., from 5 to 6:30 p.m. Monday.

These meetings consist of open houses from 5 to 7 p.m., formal presentations at 7 p.m. and informal open houses from 8 to 9 p.m.:

- Cottage Grove, All Saints Lutheran Church, 8100 Belden Blvd., Monday
- St. Paul Park City Hall, 600 Portland Ave., Thursday (for St. Paul Park, Newport and Grey Cloud Island Township)
- Woodbury, Woodbury Lutheran Church, 7380 Afton Road (near Valley Creek Road and Queens Drive), Tuesday
- South St. Paul, Central Square Community Center, Centennial Room, 100 Seventh Ave. N., Feb. 22

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