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State of Wisconsin
Department of Health Services

DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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October 4, 2019

Christine Haag
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Remediation & Redevelopment Program Director

Dear Ms. Haag,

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) received a request from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to assess the health risks of perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in surface waters. This request is part of the ongoing investigation at Starkweather Creek, Truax Field, 4000 International Lane, Madison, WI (BRRTS Activity No. 02-13-584369). We were specifically asked for assistance with messaging to put on signs in the area.

During recreational activities in lakes and creeks, people can be exposed to PFAS by swallowing and touching the water. Accidental swallowing (ingestion) is the main source of PFAS exposure from surface water; this is especially true for children as they swallow more water than adults during recreational activities. However, touching (dermal) is a minor source of PFAS exposure. Available information suggests that as a class of chemicals PFAS do not easily enter through the skin, although the extent to which they do cross the skin depends on the chemical's characteristics and some PFAS are more readily absorbed than others. This means that people are not likely to absorb PFAS through the skin while swimming, splashing, or wading in the waters.

There is a small chance of swallowing (ingestion exposure) PFAS in surface water during recreational activities. Accidentally swallowing water is unlikely to cause someone to become sick. However, we recommend avoiding unnecessary exposure to PFAS to prevent any potential long-term health effects. Touching (dermal exposure) is not a major source of exposure from surface water and should not lead to health effects. However, we recommend people wash their hands after touching surface water to avoid accidentally ingesting PFAS through hand-to-mouth activity. Currently, we do not know how much PFAS is present in fish caught from this area. However, following the current statewide fish consumption advisory will limit your PFAS exposure.

Recommendations:

To best protect people from potential PFAS exposure from surface water, DHS recommends people avoid drinking or accidentally swallowing water and wash after wading or playing in the water. We also recommend pets to be thoroughly rinsed off after contact with water to avoid swallowing PFAS that may be on their fur.

DHS recommends this information be shared broadly with the community, either through the posting of signs or other communication methods, such as websites. The attached appendix has sample sign language to include on the signs.

Please let me know if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Clara Jeong".

Clara Jeong, PhD
Toxicologist
Division of Public Health

Appendix: Sample Sign Language

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services recommends that to best protect you, your family, and your pets from potential PFAS exposure:

- Avoid drinking or accidentally swallowing the water.
- Wash your hands after wading or playing in the water.
- Rinse pets after contact with water to avoid swallowing PFAS that may be on their fur.

Touching the water is not a health concern.

For more health information, visit:

- Wis. DHS website: www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/chemical/pfas.htm
- Wis. DNR Fish Advisories: www.dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/consumption