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Rep. Brinks Legislation Would Toughen Drinking Water Standards

Measure would bring clean drinking water rules in line with other states

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LANSING — State Rep. **Winnie Brinks** (D-Grand Rapids) is introducing legislation that will strengthen Michigan drinking water regulations for the dangerous chemicals perfluorooctane sulfonate and perfluorooctanoic acid, or PFOS and PFOA, which are posing a hazard to families in northern Kent County and at other sites around Michigan. The current U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's safe drinking water advisory threshold for PFOA and PFOS is 70 parts per trillion (ppt) combined, but one Kent County resident living near the Wolverine World Wide tannery site where the chemicals are used had her private well tested and found 38,000 ppt of the contaminant in her water.

“These are chemicals that are dangerous to human health, and can cause cancers, birth defects, thyroid and liver disease, and other serious conditions,” Rep. Brinks said. “The state has an obligation to protect public health, and that includes making sure that our drinking water is clean. It’s an obligation that requires immediate action before the health of even one more person is compromised, as we’ve seen happen in Flint already. It’s obvious that Michigan needs better standards when it comes to regulating the presence of hazardous chemicals in our drinking water.”

PFOS and PFOA chemicals have recently been found in drinking water near the former Wolverine World Wide tannery in Kent County, where they had been in use for decades, but the compounds have shown up in other sites around the state. Groundwater in Iosco County, [near the former Wurtsmith Air Force Base \(https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdhhs/PFCs_in_Drinking_Water_Wells_532618_7.pdf\)](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdhhs/PFCs_in_Drinking_Water_Wells_532618_7.pdf), has tested at 10,000 times higher than the 70 ppt EPA guidelines and may be migrating toward drinking water wells. Near the Camp Grayling National Guard training base, about 83 wells have [tested above the EPA limit \(http://www.mlive.com/news/index.ssf/2017/09/grayling_pfas_expand_east.html\)](http://www.mlive.com/news/index.ssf/2017/09/grayling_pfas_expand_east.html) for PFOA and PFOS.

“We’re seeing an unfortunate trend: The Snyder-Schuetz administration has failed to make Michigan’s public health a priority, especially when it comes to clean water,” Rep. Brinks said. “As we’ve seen in Flint, and now again with these dangerous substances in our well water, our state has moved too slowly when it comes to safeguarding our people. We need leaders who will move quickly to protect our health, and especially the health of our children.”

Rep. Brinks has already called for a hearing on the use of PFOS and PFOA chemicals at the Wolverine World Wide tannery before the House Oversight Committee. The hearing she requested would involve Wolverine World Wide CEO Blake W. Krueger, 3M Chief Sustainability Officer Jean Bennington Sweeney, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality Director Heidi Grether, and other scientific and health experts.

Moving forward, Rep. Brinks said steps must be taken to restore clean water to families whose wells or water lines were tainted with hazardous water.

“Families’ wells were poisoned through no fault of their own,” Rep. Brinks said. “It was the state’s job to assure them that their drinking water was clean. If the state fell down on the job, then the state should step up to the plate and make sure that their source of drinking water is clean once again.”

“The need for clean drinking water is not a partisan issue,” Rep. Brinks said. “Water doesn’t care about district boundaries, or which party a family tends to vote for. PFOS and PFOA chemicals are invading the wells of all of our constituents. I urge all of my colleagues to come together and take swift action on this, so that we can protect each and every one of Michigan’s families.”
