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MPCA brings cutting-edge technology to Minnesota to remove PFAS from water

Minnesota is the first state government in U.S. to use this combination of innovative technologies to address "forever chemicals"

(St. Paul, MN) – The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) today announced the purchase of new state-of-the-art emerging technology to remove and destroy bulk concentrations of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) from contaminated water in the environment. This fall, the state will deploy the technology in the East Metro as part of the ongoing work to address PFAS contamination affecting the drinking water for roughly 174,000 residents. The system is paid for with funds from the 3M settlement.

The process works in two parts. The first technology, surface activated foam fractionation (SAFF), injects outdoor air into contaminated water, turning PFAS into foam that can be separated from the water. The foam is then removed, PFAS levels are significantly reduced, and the water is returned to the environment — both cleaner and safer. The PFAS concentrate then goes to the DEFLUORO unit, a second technology where the carbon-fluorine bonds (the backbone of PFAS chemicals) are broken through electrochemical oxidation. Both technologies are mobile and work without adding any chemicals back into the surface or groundwater.

“This pilot project marks the beginning of a new era for PFAS clean-up in Minnesota,” said MPCA Commissioner Katrina Kessler. “This study will help us address PFAS contamination at the source and develop long-term solutions for cleaner water — ensuring safe drinking water for Minnesotans. We hope to eventually employ this technology around the state including in Greater Minnesota, where PFAS is a growing concern.”

With fewer than 20 systems in existence, the SAFF technology is in high demand across the globe for its innovative ability to separate PFAS from water safely and quickly. Minnesota is the first state government in the country to purchase and implement it. The SAFF unit will deploy at Tablyn Park in Lake Elmo for the first round of testing on groundwater and surface water. It will likely move to other testing locations over the next one to two years. The DEFLUORO unit will be staged at the former Washington County landfill location.

Australian-based OPEC Systems, Ltd. designed the SAFF technology. U.S.-based AECOM designed the DEFLUORO unit. The SAFF unit is in route to Minnesota from Australia and is scheduled to arrive next month.

State agencies are working with city and county representatives to ensure safe handling practices under applicable regulations. None of the water used in this temporary test is connected to the city’s drinking water, which remains safe and well within Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) drinking water guidelines for PFAS impacts.

“Lake Elmo has been ground zero for PFAS contamination for years,” said Lake Elmo City Council member Jeff Holtz. “The City of Lake Elmo is excited to partner with the MPCA on the pilot study. Tablyn Park offers a unique opportunity to test this PFAS destroying technology on both groundwater and surface water sources. We look forward to learning more about how it may improve our valuable natural resources.”

New information obtained during the pilot testing will help determine how and where to treat water in the East Metro. The MPCA, MDH and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources have worked diligently to ensure safe drinking water for all East Metro communities, and this project is just one component of the greater strategy to effectively utilize funds from the 3M settlement to clean up PFAS.

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About the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency is a state agency committed to ensuring that every Minnesotan has healthy air, sustainable lands, clean water, and a better climate.