

# Midwest Environmental ADVOCATES

*pro bono publico*

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## **Rural Residents in Northeastern Wisconsin Urged to Test Well Water for Signs of Contamination**

**Green Bay, WI** – Today, a nonprofit environmental and public health law center advised rural residents in northeastern Wisconsin to test their wells for signs of contamination from livestock manure.

Midwest Environmental Advocates issued the advisory after recent test results from approximately 18 rural wells in a southern Brown County community known as Wayside showed the water was unsafe to drink.

“Rural residents in northeastern Wisconsin should test their water for harmful bacteria to ensure that the water is safe to drink, especially for children and the elderly,” said Andrew Hanson, a staff attorney with Midwest Environmental Advocates, a law center that has represented another family in a case of manure-related well contamination in neighboring Kewaunee County.

Hanson stressed that water can appear to be clear and have no odor, but nonetheless be contaminated with bacteria.

On February 14, the DNR issued a boil water notice for the residents of the area surrounding Wayside, noting that 50% of the rural wells in the area tested positive for coliform bacteria.

Media reports indicated that residents had already noticed that their water smelled like livestock manure. Between 2004 and 2005, approximately 34 wells in northeastern Wisconsin have been contaminated with what the DNR determined was likely manure. Many of the well-contaminations were linked to the disposal of manure on frozen or snow-covered ground, where the manure can easily move to groundwater sources.

In southern Brown County, a break in a manure transfer hose at a large livestock facility is a possible cause of the well contaminations. Numerous areas of shallow bedrock and winter freeze/thaw conditions typical in northeastern Wisconsin can increase the risk of contamination by allowing manure to travel quickly to groundwater.

## FAST FACTS

- Midwest Environmental Advocates is a nonprofit environmental law center that provides technical assistance and legal representation to communities and families working for clean air, clean water, and clean government.
- From July 2004 to June 2005, there were 52 recorded manure runoff events in Wisconsin that were reported to the DNR.
- In 2004 and 2005 combined, there were a total of 34 manure-related well contamination events in northeastern Wisconsin alone. Many of the well-contamination events were associated with the application of manure on frozen and snow covered ground by large livestock operations known as concentrated animal feeding operations.
- Northeastern Wisconsin's areas of shallow, fractured bedrock and high water table make the area especially susceptible to groundwater contamination, including from livestock manure.
- **Testing your well water** can be arranged by contacting the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene at **608-224-6203**.
  - An operator will direct you to a customer service representative who will send you a testing kit by mail.
  - Carefully follow the instructions in the testing kit and return your samples to the laboratory at the address provided. Your well water will be tested for total coliform bacteria and e.coli bacteria for a total cost of \$22.00.
  - The State will respond with your results within 24-28 hours and will advise you as to whether your water is safe or unsafe.
  - If your water is unsafe, you should contact Gary Paplham, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Drinking Water Specialist at 920-662-54532 for further advice and assistance.