

Midwest Environmental ADVOCATES

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Public Health Advocates Press for Manure Spreading Restrictions After Passage of Well Contamination Reimbursement Law

(Madison) - Public health advocates cautiously praised the Governor's recent signing of a bill that would reimburse low-income rural residents that suffer manure-related well contamination. The bill was rushed through the legislature after approximately 67 wells in rural Brown County were discovered to be contaminated with coliform bacteria, likely linked to manure and waste spreading near those wells.

"This is a good emergency measure taken by the legislature, but unfortunately will not get to the source of the problem that will cause future well contamination - manure and waste spreading on shallow bedrock," said Judy Treml, a Kewaunee County resident whose well was contaminated with manure spread by a livestock factory in February of 2004.

The recent well contaminations in southern Brown County are in addition to several more that occurred over the last year.

Between July 1, 2004 and June 30, 2005, the DNR recorded 52 manure spills. While 17% of the manure spills caused fishkills in valuable fisheries around the state, the DNR found that an alarming 20% of manure spills contaminated the wells of rural property owners, threatening public health.

Most of the well contamination events occurred on the Niagra Escarpment, an area of relatively shallow bedrock and high water table covering a large portion of eastern Wisconsin which includes parts of Manitowoc, Kewaunee, Brown, and Door Counties.

"Northeastern Wisconsin is in the middle of a public health crisis. We hope the DNR and the legislature will move just as quickly to approve restrictions on manure spreading on frozen and snow-covered fields," said Andrew Hanson, staff attorney with Midwest Environmental Advocates, Inc., a nonprofit environmental law center that has provided assistance to rural families, including the Tremls, whose wells have been contaminated with manure.

"Manure spreading on frozen and snow-covered fields significantly increases the risk of manure contamination of groundwater and streams," Hanson added.