

Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League

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VIA EMAIL

April 7, 2023

Dr. Tom Augspurger

Chair

Secretary's Science Advisory Board

North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality

217 West Jones Street

Raleigh, North Carolina 27603

Dear Dr. Augspurger and Board Members:

I attended the April 5, 2023, meeting of the Science Advisory Board (SAB), which, as always, was very informative. Thank you for all you are doing to protect public health and the environment in North Carolina.

Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League (BREDL) has been concerned about the lack of meaningful communication from the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to the public regarding PFAS in their drinking water. In fact, we are quite disappointed at inaction so as not to “alarm the public.” This response is inadequate and approaches the unethical. One of the SAB members mentioned this issue saying “ You’re talking about millions of people. They are exposed to levels that exceeded the four. So it really speaks to, I think a need for a really effective communication strategy” . We agree. In fact, BREDL has been reaching out to DEQ, DHHS, and local government since the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued health advisories for GenX, PFOA, PFOS, and PFBS asking for them to communicate with the public regarding PFAS in the drinking water

being supplied to them by municipalities and private companies. Enclosed is the letter BREDL sent to Secretary Elizabeth Biser in October 2022 detailing BREDL's concerns. So far, our efforts have been unsuccessful; neither state agencies nor many local governments are doing enough—if they are doing anything at all—to alert the public.

Since the date of that communication with Secretary Biser, we have determined that many more counties have PFAS in their water that “exceeded the four,” including Johnston County, where I live, and Harnett County, where Johnston buys some volume of water from. Harnett County also provides water to Holly Springs, Apex, Moore County, Fuquay Varina, Spring Lake, Linden, and Fort Bragg.¹ When queried about PFAS monitoring, Harnett County responded that they are not currently testing for PFAS and are not required to do so but that a “consecutive system” had tested and PFOA and PFOS had been detected—PFOS 11.0 ng/l and PFOA 8.6 ng/l. That system was Fort Bragg. It does not appear that DEQ sampled this large system. We have provided this information to DEQ. The City of Sanford also regularly detects numerous PFAS in their raw and finished water. I am including a letter that BREDL chapter Chatham-Lee Environmental Action Network sent the City in February.

While we appreciate DEQ posting information on the 50 systems they tested last Fall - those that voluntarily test (like Sanford and Johnston County) were not included. This is the response I received from a DEQ spokesperson regarding that apparent loophole: “As noted on our website, the data collected by DEQ last fall from 50 initial systems is available online, and we plan to expand the systems that we sample and from which we will share data. Other systems are monitoring for PFAS but are not under a regulatory obligation to share this data with us. We recommend that users contact individual systems for data they have collected if it is not publicly posted by the system. We are actively encouraging systems to make this information available to the public. DEQ is exploring the feasibility of displaying data provided to the agency in the future.”

We agree that North Carolina has done more than other states on PFAS, but the inaction on public notification could negate that. Imagine how people will feel when they find out that DEQ and DHHS have known for *years* about PFAS in drinking water provided by public and private

¹ <https://www.harnett.org/utilities/>

water systems, and they were not told? When they learn that they have been drinking, cooking, and making formula for their babies with PFAS-contaminated water?

In conclusion, Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League is requesting that the Science Advisory Board act in their advisory capacity and recommend that the Department of Environmental Quality take immediate action to meaningfully inform the public about PFAS in their water. We know that the Department notifies private well users by mail if PFAS are detected. Consumers who use drinking water provided by public or private systems deserve no less.

Sincerely,

Therese Vick

North Carolina Healthy, Sustainable, Communities Campaign Coordinator