http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/clean-drinking-water-s5.jpg 

DNR plan will provide drinking water to residents with contaminated wells.

MADISON – Clean Wisconsin, the state's oldest and largest environmental organization, welcomed on Tuesday the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resource's recently announced plan to provide emergency drinking water to rural residents whose wells have been contaminated by livestock manure.

"We're pleased DNR is taking steps to ensure residents who are impacted by manure-contaminated wells will have immediate access to clean and safe drinking water," said Water Quality Specialist Scott Laeser, of Clean Wisconsin.

Rural residents who live near fields where livestock manure is spread for fertilizer and disposal sometimes experience so-called "brownwater events" in which manure from nearby farms seeps into private wells.

Wisconsin has seen a dramatic increase in the number of large livestock operations in recent years, which has lead to huge increases in the amount of liquid waste being spread on the landscape. When liquid manure is spread on fields it soaks into the ground and can eventually make its way into the groundwater. When contaminated water ends up in families' private wells, the concentration of dangerous pathogens spikes. This is especially a problem in areas of the state where the geology makes groundwater more susceptible to contamination.

Clean Wisconsin General Counsel Katie Nekola said the DNR's plan to provide safe drinking water to affected residents is a step in the right direction, but she added that sustainable, long-term solutions are needed to prevent manure from contaminating groundwater in the first place.

“This is a temporary fix,” Nekola said. “The people of Wisconsin have a fundamental right to clean and safe water, and the state needs to address this serious public health issue with real and lasting solutions.”

Laeser added that the DNR is drafting targeted performance standards for areas of the state most vulnerable to groundwater contamination.

“These standards must strengthen manure spreading and handling requirements on all farms in order to provide citizens in northeastern Wisconsin – and elsewhere in the state – reliable access to clean drinking water,” Laeser said.

Information and details on the DNR's drinking water program are available at dnr.wi.gov/topic/drinkingwater/manure.html
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Scott Laeser, Water Quality Specialist, and Katie Nekola, General Counsel, contributed to this story.