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MADIGAN ANNOUNCES LEGISLATION TO REQUIRE COMMUNITY NOTIFICATION WHEN DRINKING WATER IS CONTAMINATED

Bill Requires that IEPA Inform Community Residents Upon Discovery Of Drinking Water Contamination

Springfield—Attorney General Lisa Madigan today proposed an amendment to the Illinois Right to Know law that requires the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) to notify users of contaminated drinking water supplies. The amendment requires that within two weeks of discovering a threat of drinking water contamination, IEPA must notify users of the water system, as well as the owners and operators.

The Attorney General's amendment, which will be Senate Amendment #1 to HB 4021, is sponsored by State Representatives Frank Mautino (D-Spring Valley) and Robert Rita, (D-Crestwood), and State Sen. Susan Garrett (D-Lake Forest), and is a response to recent news that the Village of Crestwood supplemented the town's water supply from a well found to be contaminated more than 20 years ago. While current law requires notification of contamination to the owners and operators of the water system (in this case, the Village of Crestwood), it does not currently require notification to the people who drink the water. Madigan's proposal would correct that problem.

"The very fact that the residents of Crestwood may have been exposed to contaminated drinking water for more than 20 years and now have to worry about how that exposure might have affected their health and the health of their families, demonstrates that this change is long overdue," said Attorney General Madigan. "I want to make sure that people have the information that they need to protect themselves."

The amendment requires IEPA to mail notices to all community residents within 14 days of determining that a threat of exposure to contaminated drinking water exists. The notice must identify the contaminant released, the level of contamination found, and the possible human health effects associated with exposure to the contaminant. IEPA must provide this notice whether or not the threat of exposure has been addressed by the owner or operator of the community water system.

"This is a matter of common sense – those most directly affected should be notified when their drinking water is or has been contaminated," said Sen. Garrett, the chief Senate sponsor of the proposal. "This bill will make sure that the Crestwood scenario does not happen again."

"I commend Attorney General Lisa Madigan for proposing common sense timelines for notification to ensure public health and safety," said Rep. Mautino.

"Crestwood residents deserve to know the full story about the safety of their drinking water," said Rep. Rita. "While we work to find out exactly what has been going on in Crestwood, we are taking this important step to ensure that no other community is denied the right to know about threats to their drinking water."

The Attorney General's office is currently investigating the actions of the Village of Crestwood regarding the use of a contaminated well as a source of drinking water. The office is working to determine what the Village did, what the Village knew, and when the Village knew it, as well as which environmental laws were violated. The office is also working to identify the source of the contamination.

"A safe water supply is absolutely critical to the health and safety of the people of Illinois. Our goal is to enforce the laws to protect the water supply and the people who use it," added Madigan. "Today, we are taking measures to strengthen those laws and make them better."

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