RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT A SAFE WATER SUPPLY

MAWSAC and TAC would like all the region's changing communities to be prepared for new, emerging contaminants and empowered to continually work to provide a safe water supply. The MAWSAC, under advisement of the TAC, recommends that, to achieve this outcome, the Metropolitan Council and the State of Minnesota support a framework to maintain equitable, long-term, integrated water approaches developed collaboratively by communities, water utilities, and regulators.

Problem

There is always the potential of another contaminant emerging in our water supply. As a region, we are not always logistically best prepared to prevent spread or be responsive when new sources of contamination are discovered.

As committees form recommendations around this challenge, look for opportunities to:

- Increase support for inter-jurisdictional coordination. Contamination does not follow the bounds of individual political entities, therefore we can and should put in place mechanisms that will allow communities to better monitor for emerging contaminants, respond more quickly in a more coordinated (less duplicative or contradictory) way, and communicate more clearly to residents and businesses so that they can trust their water supplies are safe and secure.
- Clarify roles and financial and logistic responsibilities for communities, regulators, and other involved entities.

Questions to consider

Consider the following questions in preparation for the meeting. The *Master Water Supply Plan* and *Thrive MSP 2040* outcomes, principles, and goals are a resource to draw on.

1) **Based on your experiences dealing with new water quality or contamination challenges, what trade-offs or tensions do you perceive that might shape public policy?** What regulatory pressures are you trying to balance?
2) **Based on your experiences dealing with new water quality or contamination challenges, what would have made you better prepared?** What is missing from current state agency response in addressing CECs and existing contamination issues? What information, plans, permits, technical and financial resources set us up to do more later? What would a readiness plan look like for communities, water utilities, and regulators?
3) **What is the level of consumer confidence in your community? Does everyone have access to good information about the safety of their water supplies and trust the utility's and agencies' advice about any steps they should take?** Are there differences in the level of trust among different groups? How can stakeholders be engaged early and often? What outreach approaches have been most effective?
4) **How could the Council and/or organizations represented on TAC help?** How could the region be better prepared to address CECs and other water quality issues?

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Potential solutions or approaches

The following proposed solutions or approaches come from conversations had by MAWSAC, TAC, and Met Council staff:

Regulatory

a) State of Minnesota, represented by state agencies like the MPCA, MDH, DNR, with partners, invests in development of protocol/operating procedure for communities facing newly found contamination as well as responding to potential decreases in contamination limits, streamlining regulatory direction to communities
b) Metropolitan Council and partners support and contribute to legislative recommendations
c) MPCA and MDH solicit input from MAWSAC and TAC re: rules and guidance on key water supply contaminants

Outreach, engagement, and training

a) Metropolitan Council, with partners, supports regional campaign about the value and quality of treated water provided by utilities with content customizable by communities
b) Metropolitan Council supports multi-community tabletop emergency response exercises
c) State of Minnesota connects with private well owners to encourage regular water quality testing (ex: at point of sale)

Financial support

a) State of Minnesota augments sources of funding for uncertainties such as contamination (examples: grant programs to communities and private well owners for CEC response, subregional feasibility assessments, plan development and projects that address unexpected events)
b) State of Minnesota provides framework and support for how different sized communities can fund water quality remediation efforts
c) State of Minnesota provides funding for private well testing to ensure equitable access to information about water quality across the region
d) Local governments leverage state and regional resources to expand water quality monitoring/assessment to fill gaps in information
e) Metropolitan Council and partners support and leverage contamination prevention and mitigation programs (examples: MnTAP, Met Council Tax Base Revitalization Account)

Research

a) State of Minnesota, with local governments, enhances monitoring to identify and publish data re: the presence of contaminants (PFAS, chlorides, nitrate, etc.) in drinking water supplies throughout the metro area
b) Metropolitan Council with partners develop an exploratory research framework to identify regional and/or subregional water quality patterns and trends, using an aggregate approach to monitor drinking water, wastewater, and surface water
c) Metropolitan Council with subregional partners supports study of the feasibility of public water systems in areas with dense populations of private wells and septic
d) Metropolitan Council, with subregional partners, evaluate interconnections (agreements, functionality, water quality issues, etc.)
e) Metropolitan Council survey to understand the implications of how the wide range of our region's citizens view their water

Regional policies and planning

a) Metropolitan Council and partners pool collective expertise to address increasingly complex water problems that require a system's approach (example: integrated consideration of water supply, watershed management, wastewater system)
b) Metropolitan Council, with partners, explores forecasts that consider a range of future scenarios to support 2050 local comprehensive plan updates and longer-term water system options and alternatives guided by local needs and capabilities
c) Metropolitan Council, with partners, monitors and analyzes the quality of surface water, groundwater and wastewater – including CECs, as appropriate – to support the assessment and protection of the region's water resources (targeting Council-owned property management and system operations and priority waters)

Information shared by TAC and MAWSAC committee members related to the topic of water quality and contamination

The following resources were shared or referred to during and after the March 23, 2021 MAWSAC-TAC workshop. They may be useful to review related to committee conversations around water quality and contamination. This is not intended to be a complete list of resources.

Nomination & Prioritization Research

- *MDH Contaminants of Emerging Concern (CEC) Program* (*13 min video*)
- *MDH Health Risk Limits*

PFAS

- *SWnewsmedia 'Forever chemicals' leaked into groundwater by local landfills (article)*
- MPCA "What are PFAS?" (*2 min video*)
- ECHA "How is the EU making sure PFAS chemicals don't stick around?" (*2 min video*)
- Clean Water Action "PFAS Chemicals are putting our health at risk" (*12 min video*)

Chloride

- U of M "The Changing Earth: Chlorides in Water" includes softeners, road salt, ag (*3 min video*)
- *MPCA Smart Salt Training Program* (*3 min video*)
- *MPCA library of statewide chloride resources*
- *PLOS ONE 'Centralized softening as a solution to chloride pollution' (2021 article)*

Groundwater monitoring data

- *MDH drinking water quality*
- *MDH consumer confidence reports*
- *MPCA groundwater quality data*
- *DNR groundwater level data*
- *MDA agricultural monitoring and assessment*
- *MC environmental information management system*

Community data

- *MC Community Profiles*
- *MC Rethinking Areas of Concentrated Poverty*
- *MPCA Understanding environmental justice*