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PRESS ADVISORY

Group seeks to add clarity to debate over drinking water

Treatment process, not the Flint River, is source of chemicals in drinking water

Flint, Michigan -- As residents and officials seek information and solutions related to concerns over the city's drinking water, the Flint River Watershed Coalition (FRWC) is helping clarify the relationship between those challenges and the health of the local watershed.

Since April 2014, the City of Flint has drawn its source water from the Flint River, which is fed by a watershed that spans seven counties. Compared to large, continuous bodies of surface freshwater, such as the Great Lakes, rivers generally contain a greater -- and often varying -- concentration of organic materials, such as decaying leaves, fish waste, etc.

On January 2nd, City of Flint officials notified residents of elevated levels of trihalomethanes (TTHM) found in the public water supply. These chemicals result when chlorine is used to disinfect source water of organic and other materials; a standard practice among the country's municipalities.

As the city works to regulate TTHM in the local water supply, it's important to understand that it is the chemical treatment of that water, rather than the health of the river, that sparked the current problem, said FRWC Executive Director Rebecca Fedewa.

"We were deeply concerned when the elevated levels of TTHM were announced," she said. "We believe that all residents have the right to safe drinking water."

"It's also important to understand that the river contains naturally-occurring materials found in healthy aquatic ecosystems. It's the challenge of making that water suitable for people to drink, rather than the health of our local watershed, that sparked the current problem."

The city plans to begin obtaining its water from Lake Huron in late 2016, when construction of a new pipeline is expected to be completed by the Karegnondi Water Authority.

Fedewa notes that FRWC staff and volunteers have consistently found the health of the Flint River and surrounding watershed to be on the rise.

"As we join city and state officials in monitoring Flint's drinking water, we will also continue to track the quality and health of the Flint River, which remains among our community's most valuable assets."

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The Flint River Watershed Coalition is an organization representing individuals, businesses, community organizations, and local units of government sharing a vision of a healthier Flint River Watershed. We envision a day when the future of our drinking water is secure and the integrity of the Flint River is protected. We believe that all people should have access to the river for recreation, swimming, and fishing as well as the economic value it provides to our communities.

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