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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Burlington DPW Releases New Test Results

As the result of a new state drinking water standard, the Town of Burlington has completed testing for a family of chemical compounds known as PFAS. The results indicate the presence of PFAS in a concentration above the new standard, and the Town is taking immediate action to address these results.

Recent testing of the Vinebrook and Mill Pond treatment plants detected per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) at levels of approximately 40 parts per trillion (ppt). Recently, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) issued a new regulation setting the drinking water standard for six PFAS at 20 nanograms per liter (ng/L), equal to 20 parts per trillion (ppt) (referred to as PFAS6). The state set its own standards because these compounds are not yet regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Currently, EPA has an advisory level for two specific PFAS compounds (PFOA and PFOS) of 70 ppt.

The DPW is constructing a plan of action to reduce the amount of PFAS in the Town drinking water, including opening its connection with Lexington to provide water from MWRA, which does not contain PFAS, to reduce demand on Burlington's sources. "We are committed to providing consumers with safe and reliable water and are working diligently to develop a plan that ensures the public water supply meets the state's new drinking water standards," said John G. Sanchez, Burlington DPW Director. "We will keep the public informed as we work with local and state officials to develop, design and implement the most expedient, effective and fiscally responsible solution to this emerging chemical of concern."

PFAS are a family of manmade chemicals used for non-stick coatings and firefighting foams. Manufacturing of certain PFAS was discontinued in the U.S. about 30 years ago, but they may still be used in imported products. PFAS are resilient and do not degrade easily in soil and water. As a result, they are widely found in the environment and many consumer products where they migrate to the food supply and drinking water. In fact, most people already have concentrations of these chemicals in their blood as food and consumer products are additional points of exposure.

Mass DEP recommends consumers in a sensitive subgroup (pregnant or nursing women, infants and people diagnosed by their health care provider to have a compromised immune system), are advised not to consume, drink, or cook with water when the level of PFAS6 is above 20 ppt. Mass DEP says that “consuming water with PFAS6 above the drinking water standard does not mean that adverse effects will occur. The degree of risk depends on the level of the chemicals and the duration of exposure.”

There are scientific studies that suggest potential links between exposure to certain PFAS in the environment and health effects. The studies have looked at the effects on the development of fetuses and infants, the thyroid, the liver, kidneys, hormone levels and the immune system, as well as if a cancer risk exists for people exposed to levels well above the drinking water standard.

Mass DEP and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control both note more research is needed and ongoing, and it is important to remember consuming water with high PFAS6 levels does not mean adverse effects will occur. While awaiting further scientific study, Mass DEP has acted to set a drinking water standard and statewide, public water suppliers are working in the best interest of consumers to lower PFAS6 levels where they are found to be at or above 20 ppt.

Consumers concerned about potential health effects of PFAS should consult a medical professional.

Water customers will soon receive in the mail an official notice from the Town as required by Mass DEP. This official notice will provide more information about PFAS6 and additional resources. We want you to know we work closely with the Mass DEP to ensure water safety and reliability, and we will consult with them at every step of the way.

For more information regarding PFAS in Burlington’s drinking water, please contact Treatment Plant Manager Russ Makiej at 781-270-1648.