

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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NHDES, Merrimack Village Water District, and Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics Investigating Perfluorochemical Found in Drinking Water

Concord, NH - The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) is today announcing that it is working with the Merrimack Village District Water System (MVDWS) and Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics to investigate the potential presence of perfluorochemicals (PFCs) in drinking water in Merrimack. Late last week, Saint-Gobain notified NHDES that perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) was detected at low levels [0.03 micrograms per liter ($\mu\text{g/L}$)] in samples taken from four water faucets within their Merrimack facility, which is served by the Merrimack Village District Water System. Due in part to the lack of health effect studies, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has not set an enforceable drinking water standard for PFOA. EPA's Office of Water has, however, established a Provisional Health Advisory of 0.4 micrograms per liter ($\mu\text{g/L}$) for PFOA. Sampling to date in Merrimack has not identified PFOA at levels above the Provisional Health Advisory level. Provisional Health Advisories reflect reasonable, health-based hazard concentrations above which action should be taken to reduce exposure to unregulated contaminants in drinking water. Currently, this Provisional Health Advisory is under review and is expected to be revised this spring.

PFOA has been detected in the Hoosick Falls, NY, water supply and in some private wells in North Bennington, VT, near other Saint-Gobain facilities. Because materials containing PFOA have been used at the plant in Merrimack and out of an abundance of caution, Saint-Gobain voluntarily tested the water at its Merrimack facility and intends to test the groundwater at its facility. NHDES will oversee this investigation and is also working closely with MVDWS and the Town of Merrimack to determine if PFOA is present in any of the MVDWS wells that cumulatively serve 25,000 customers in Merrimack. NHDES will also investigate private wells in the vicinity of the Saint-Gobain facility and the MVDWS wells to determine whether they have been affected.

PFCs are a family of manmade chemicals that have been used for decades as an ingredient to make products that resist heat, oil, stains, grease, and water, such as non-stick cookware, weather resistant outdoor clothing and gear, and stain resistant carpeting. Many chemicals in this group, including PFOA, are commonly present in the environment and do not break down easily. According to the company, polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), which contains PFOA, has been used at the plant in Merrimack, by Saint-Gobain and previous facility owners.

Studies have shown that nearly all people have some level of PFCs in their blood. Potential health effects from exposure to low levels of PFCs are not well understood. To date studies have been inconclusive as to whether PFCs can affect growth and development, hormone levels including thyroid hormone, liver enzyme levels, cholesterol levels, immune function or occurrence of certain types of cancer. Further research is needed to determine whether PFCs can

cause health changes in humans. The EPA states that existing evidence is too limited to support a strong link between PFCs and cancer in people.

The EPA has also done nation-wide sampling for PFCs as a preliminary step toward determining the need for national drinking water standards that would be enforceable under the Safe Drinking Water Act. In 2014, the wells in Merrimack that provide water to Saint-Gobain were tested and PFOA was detected once at 0.042 micrograms per liter ($\mu\text{g/L}$)(which is below the Provisional Health Advisory level), but was not detected in a subsequent sample. MVDWS is resampling those and their other wells in response to the detection of PFOA in water samples taken at Saint-Gobain. This testing is in addition to the routine water quality monitoring performed by MVDWS.

NHDES will work closely with MVDWS and the Town of Merrimack to ensure that residents are promptly informed of the results of the MVDWS well tests and any additional information resulting from the planned groundwater investigations being conducted by Saint-Gobain and

NHDES. For additional information please contact Jim Martin at (603)-271-3710.