

WARNING & CALL FOR SUMMIT ON WATER TO THE PEOPLE OF VERMONT: Waters are in danger.

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Water is sacred, essential for life. My soul cries out for a deep, transparent, transformative reckoning about water quality and solid waste management in this State. How can we claim "clean water"?

Each one of us is utterly dependent upon clean water for health and life, and we are all related through sharing the limited fresh water on Earth. No matter what our station in life might be, we depend on water for life. And we share that water with millions of other living beings as well. If that water is sick from many toxins, life is in danger. As a stakeholder, a person of faith, as Earth Community Advocate, I call for a deep re-assessment of our relationship with Earth, of our consumer society and our treatment of water.

Vermont's water quality is in serious danger, now. Consider the many ways we contaminate the water:

- > pesticides used in the State of Vermont (VT Agency of Agriculture Food & Markets, 2020);
- > pesticides used by individuals (no data available);
- > lampricide TFM ("possesses many of the chemical features known to impart persistence to organic compounds," EPA, 1999) poured into 4 tributaries of Lake Champlain in 2020 (USFW, 2020) and roughly 100 times in 30 years (USFW, 2020A);
- > contaminants from roadways in runoff to streams and waters;
- > frequent overflows from wastewater treatment facilities (WWTFs) releasing untreated sewage and toxins into waters of the state (ANR/DEC, 2021), likely to be increased by Climate Chaos;
- > leachate, or garbage juice, from landfills – open or closed – discharged into WWTFs and ultimately into waters of the State with per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) (Weston & Sampson, 2020);
- > sludge with heavy metals and priority pollutants from WWTFs applied to farmfields (Gokee A, 2021);
- > pharmaceuticals, caffeine, personal care products as endocrine disruptors leaving WWTFs;
- > PFAS in groundwater (ANR, 2021).

No one data collection point gathers all this information, so it is difficult to get the whole picture. The Lake Champlain Basin Program's State of the Lake Report includes data on some but not all toxins (LCBP 2021). We can't see or smell the toxins in the water, and prefer to avoid difficult information. We cannot assess the cumulative or synergistic effects of mixtures of very low concentrations of toxins acting as endocrine disruptors. We cannot predict the tipping point for ecosystem collapse, or synergistic effects in humans or other creatures, or when the toxins become too harmful. The Precautionary Principle becomes essential for living more respectfully with Earth (Kriebel D et al 2001).

Relying upon rivers and lakes to dilute poisons is a dangerous and outmoded path. We cannot ignore small, low-level contamination due to the dangers of endocrine disrupting compounds, including PFAS, to human and other lives. Toxins are slowly unraveling the web of life, causing extinctions and undermining our immune systems and those of other creatures (Colborn et al 1996). PFAS target the immune system, and may undermine the effectiveness of vaccines against COVID-19 (Sunderland et al 2018). Herbicides undermine our gut micro-biome, also damaging the immune and endocrine systems and general health (Rosenfeld, CS 2017).

The intimate connection between solid waste management and water quality can no longer be avoided. ANR has made one important step in requiring development of leachate pretreatment, but leachate itself is toxic, containing PFAS, priority pollutants and heavy metals. We need to attack the problem "upstream" to limit the use of PFAS-laden products in the first place. We must stop importing leachate from other states. WWTFs receiving garbage juice containing PFAS and priority pollutants cannot remove these toxins, so they pass through the WWTF and enter waters of the state, drinking water for thousands of Vermonters. We must examine the role of a publicly traded corporation in this work. There is NO A WAY.

It is time to invoke the Precautionary Principle. It is time for a Summit of Stakeholders -- communities of faith, environmental justice advocates, state officials (?), all who love Vermont's waters, Canadians, all who drink the water -- to describe our situation, to develop and promote more respectful ways of managing and protecting Earth's resources. Until then, we cannot claim "clean water".

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