

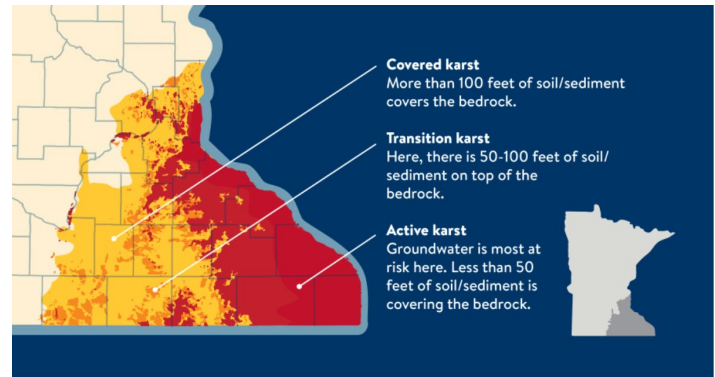
FAQ: Petition to EPA to use emergency authority to address the drinking water crisis in southeastern Minnesota

Last updated: May 9, 2023

MCEA, the Minnesota Well Owners' Organization, Environmental Working Group, and eight other groups petitioned the Environmental Protection Agency to help fix the ongoing problem of nitrate contamination in the drinking water in southeastern Minnesota. You can read the full petition [here](#).

What is the problem you're trying to address?

We need to fix the persistent contamination of drinking water in the Minnesota karst region. Nitrate levels in this area routinely exceed federal and state drinking water standards, putting the health of approximately 380,000 area residents at serious risk. Nitrate-contaminated drinking water can lead to all sorts of health problems, especially for infants and children.



Source: MPCA, based on a map created by E. Calvin Alexander Jr., Yongli Gao, and Jeff Green.

What caused this problem?

The main sources of nitrate contamination are industrial agricultural and concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs). These industrial agricultural land use practices haven't been effectively regulated by state and local government authorities, and local residents have paid the price. We want the EPA to step in and help. The Safe Drinking Water Act gives EPA the authority to help when people's health is at risk and the problem is not being effectively addressed by the state and local regulators.

What types of action do you want the EPA to take?

We're asking the EPA to figure out where, exactly, the nitrate is coming from. We know it's from land use practices, but no one is taking responsibility for fixing it. We're asking EPA to, at a minimum:

- Require the polluters to provide a free and safe alternative source of drinking water for impacted communities;
- Prohibit new CAFOs and existing CAFOs from expanding until nitrate concentrations in contaminated wells reach safe levels;
- Provide public notice of potential contamination events, such as manure land applications;
- Identify public water systems, private wells, or groundwater monitoring wells near potentially contaminated areas; and
- Clean up contaminated soils endangering underground sources of drinking water.

Is there anything state agencies and local governments can do to address this problem?

Yes. We would like to see state and local government officials:

- Use conservative animal unit caps to limit the growth of feedlot operations;
- Encourage widespread adoption of best management practices like cover crops AND ensure compliance with water quality certification programs;
- Establish grant programs to increase manure storage capacity for small and mid-size feedlots;
- Create a more protective feedlot permit for the geologically sensitive karst region; and
- Extend the Groundwater Protection Rule to the township scale.



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