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# **Health Management Information on North Pole Sulfolane Exposure**



A public health program at the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Section of Epidemiology; the Environmental Public Health Program cautions the public about the possible health problems brought by sulfolane exposure from the wells of the North Pole area. Sulfolane is an industrial solvent that was found in wells near the North Pole Flint Hills refinery in fall 2009. The studies conducted the Alaska Dept. of Health and Social Services in cancer (from 1996-2007) and birth defects (1996-2009) amongst residents of the North Pole showed no increase in both fields in comparison to the entire state population.

“Although levels of sulfolane in people’s wells are substantially lower than those that caused subtle health effects in test animals, we cannot say with absolute certainty that there will not be any health effects from long-term exposure to low levels of sulfolane in drinking water, because no studies have looked at this in animals or people,” said Nim Ha, a co-author of the report.

The North Pole Refinery site online says, "On February 14, 2011, the City of North Pole brought online two new drinking water wells to serve as the municipal water source. These wells were installed outside of the plume's capture zone that does not include the refinery. DEC and the City of North Pole are continuing to work together to sample and analyze the municipal water supply for sulfolane as well as for other regulated chemicals."

You can call 907-488-5104 if you live in that area and would like a Flint Hills' contractor to test a well sample, the site says.

Alaska's largest refinery, the North Pole Refinery, was purchased by Flint Hills Resources in July, 2004, along with an anchorage plant, they say. “Flint Hills has provided a long-term alternative water supply to all North Pole residents with detectable levels of sulfolane in their well water, and we recommend that they continue to use an alternative source of water for drinking and eating. This also applies to pets and other household animals,” Ha added.

For more information about sulfolane contamination in North Pole groundwater, go to <http://dec.alaska.gov/spar/csp/sites/north-pole-refinery/> and full report is available for public view at <http://www.epi.alaska.gov/eh/sulfolane/DHSSHealthConsultSulfolaneGroundwater.pdf>.

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