Clean Water Letter to the Editor

Clean water is one of the greatest public health advances of the 20th century. While the Clean Water Act has made great advances in the 44 years since it was passed, we still have a long way to go. Thousands of Americans still become ill each year from contaminated drinking water and there are more than 30 outbreaks of waterborne illnesses occur yearly. By ensuring clean water for all, we have a significant opportunity to prevent disease and support the health of all Americans.

When the Clean Water Act was originally passed almost 45 years ago, it only addressed navigable water. We now know that that animal and human waste, industrial pollution, and waterborne diseases are found in smaller bodies of water not covered by the Clean Water Act. By addressing the contamination in these bodies of water we can have a significant, positive impact on public health

Unfortunately, a much needed update to the Clean Water Act, the Clean Water Rule, is slated for repeal by the Trump Administration. This rule is based on clear science that shows how important upstream sources are to clean drinking water. The Clean Water Rule protects the streams that are the source of drinking water for more than 117 million Americans.

As a nurse, I recognize that the US Environmental Protection Agency is a public health agency. Now is the time for them to put public health first and scrap plans to repeal this science-based, common-sense regulation that will protect the drinking waters of millions.

Clean Water Op Ed

Clean water is one of the greatest public health advances of the 20th century. While the Clean Water Act has made great strides to ensure all of our citizens have access to clean, drinkable water there are many families who still do not have access to clean water. Thousands of Americans still become ill each year from contaminated drinking water and there are more than 30 outbreaks of waterborne illnesses yearly. By ensuring clean water for all, we have a significant opportunity to prevent disease and support the health of all Americans.

The sources of water contamination can come from a variety of sources, such as dumping of sewage into rivers to industrial waste in streams. For the past 20 years, environmental and public health officials have grappled with how to address these many sources of contamination. When the Clean Water Act was originally passed almost 45 years ago, it only addressed navigable water. We now know that that animal and human waste, industrial pollution, and waterborne diseases are found in smaller bodies of water not covered by the Clean Water Act. By addressing the contamination in these bodies of water we can have a significant, positive impact on public health

Unfortunately, a much needed update to the Clean Water Act that addresses these small bodies of water, the Clean Water Rule, is slated for repeal by the Trump Administration. This rule is based on clear science and extensive public input and highlights how important upstream sources are to clean drinking water. The Clean Water Rule protects the streams that feed the drinking water for more than 117 million Americans and it safeguards millions of acres of wetlands that filter pollutants and protect communities by absorbing floodwaters.

As highlighted by the recent crisis in Flint Michigan many communities need the EPA to strongly enforce current regulations so children and families are not unknowingly being exposed to toxic metals such as lead and other toxic chemicals. There is no safe level of lead and children exposed to this toxic heavy metal may face life-long issues as the developing brain is particularly susceptible to the its toxic effects.

Many of those impacted by unsafe drinking water are low-income families or communities of color. As we saw in Flint and Charleston, WV, where the drinking water supply was contaminated by chemicals leaking from a storage tank, families had to resort to bottled water for cooking and bathing or drive miles and miles to find access to clean water. These are expenses these families cannot afford. These communities should not be forced to access clean water in this way.

These spills also create concerns for hospitals and healthcare facilities. Their patients are already some of the most vulnerable among us. Not having access to clean water creates a significant burden on these facilities. Following the spill in Charleston WV hospitals were scrambling to find enough clean water as hospitals use an incredible amount of water – handwashing by staff and visitors, laundry, sanitation, and even newborns first baths.

As a nurse, I recognize that the US Environmental Protection Agency is a public health agency. Now is the time for them to put public health first and scrap plans to repeal this science-based, public health regulation that will protect the drinking waters of millions.