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## **TESTING TO BEGIN FOR PHARMACEUTICALS, HORMONES, AND HOUSEHOLD CHEMICALS IN CAPE COD PRIVATE DRINKING WATER WELLS**

### **50 Volunteers with Private Wells Needed for Silent Spring Institute Study**

Testing is set to begin in November for pharmaceuticals, hormones, and household chemicals in Cape Cod private drinking water wells. The new study extends research by Silent Spring Institute on potential exposures to hormonal pollutants leaching from septic systems into groundwater and ponds.

Tests in nine public water districts on Cape Cod last spring revealed detectable levels of pharmaceuticals and consumer product chemicals in 75% of tested wells. Contamination was greater in developed areas that have more septic systems. The two most frequently detected chemicals were sulfamethoxazole, a common antibiotic, and PFOS, a chemical used in stain-resistant and nonstick coatings and in fire-fighting foams. Levels of these compounds in several wells were among the highest reported in US drinking water.

Now Silent Spring Institute is planning to study Cape Cod private wells, where the risk of chemical contamination is even greater than in public wells. The Institute is seeking residents with private wells to take part in the study. "This is an opportunity," says Dr. Julia Brody, the Institute's Executive Director, "for individuals to get free testing to find out about the quality of their drinking water. It is also an opportunity to help all of us better understand how water is vulnerable to contamination, not only on the Cape, but also nationally, so we can develop more effective ways to protect human and ecological health."

Chemicals targeted in the study are not currently regulated in drinking water and the health effects of low-level exposures are not known. "We are targeting these chemicals because laboratory studies show they can mimic hormones such as estrogen or cause cancer in animals," explains Dr. Laurel Schaidler, a research scientist at Silent Spring Institute and the study director. "In order to understand the health implications and plan for exposure reduction, we need to learn more about patterns and sources of exposure."

Silent Spring Institute is seeking volunteers with private wells who are willing to participate in testing. Land use mapping in the Institute's sophisticated geographic information system (GIS) will be used to narrow the volunteer list to 50 for initial tests of nitrate and boron levels, which are indicators of wastewater. Then 20 wells will be chosen for more extensive analysis.

[Barnstable County residents with private wells who would like to participate in the study and have their well tested at no cost can contact study leader Dr. Laurel Schaidler at Silent Spring Institute by emailing \[schaidler@silentspring.org\]\(mailto:schaidler@silentspring.org\) or by calling \(617\) 332-4288 x224.](#)

Residents whose wells are tested can choose to receive confidential results from their own well along with additional information for interpreting the results. A summary report of study findings will be presented at community meetings and in scientific publications. The names and addresses of participants will be kept confidential and will never be used in any reports or public meetings.

Silent Spring Institute research continues to look for environmental links that may contribute to Cape Cod's historically higher incidence of breast cancer. One of the ways to do this is to monitor chemical exposures in homes and drinking water. Roughly 85 percent of Cape Cod's wastewater is treated by septic systems. This wastewater contains everything that goes down the sink and gets flushed down the toilet, including natural hormones and medicines that our bodies do not absorb. Ultimately, some of these chemicals can leach into the groundwater that supplies drinking water. Gathering information about emerging contaminants will help in designing better water quality protection.

Results from Silent Spring Institute tests of Cape Cod public drinking water wells in 2009 can be found at the following site: [http://silentspring.org/our-publications/study\\_reports/emerging-contaminants-cape-cod-drinking-water](http://silentspring.org/our-publications/study_reports/emerging-contaminants-cape-cod-drinking-water).

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*Founded in 1994, Silent Spring Institute is a non-profit research organization dedicated to studying the environment's effect on women's health. Silent Spring Institute has been studying water quality on Cape Cod for over 10 years. For more information, please visit: [silentspring.org](http://silentspring.org).*