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Source Water Monitoring for Radiological Elements

PHILADELPHIA – Water samples tested by the EPA on April 4 at the Water Department’s three drinking water treatment plants found low levels of Iodine 131. The sample from the Queen Lane Treatment Plant showed 2.2 picoCuries per liter—the highest drinking-water level found from the three samples. The sampling results are at low levels and are at or below the Safe Drinking Water Act’s levels designed to protect the health of an individual over a 70-year lifespan.

The PADEP and PWD monitor the Schuylkill and the Delaware rivers and their tributaries to ensure the safety of our drinking water and to understand what pollutants may impact our rivers and streams. PWD also monitors and tests its drinking water on a daily basis at its treatment plants and in its distribution system. EPA and PADEP have more recently enhanced sampling programs for Iodine 131 and other radioactive compounds following the failure of nuclear facilities in Japan. Similar testing is taking place across the nation. According to the EPA, in a typical day, Americans receive doses of radiation from natural sources that are about a hundred times higher than what we have detected in Pennsylvania.

The PWD, EPA and PADEP are working together to develop a joint action plan that will accelerate the sampling for Iodine 131 and other radiological elements in our waterways in combination with an aggressive program to track down the potential sources of Iodine 131 in the Schuylkill River Watershed. PADEP has also found Iodine 131 in both the Schuylkill River and Wissahickon Creek in samples taken since the Japanese earthquake.

PWD is also reviewing its current water treatment technologies for efficiency in removing Iodine 131 and other radioactive elements and has been adding carbon to the treatment process at its Queen Lane Plant as a cautionary measure. Carbon works to absorb contaminants in drinking water and is removed during the filtration process.

PWD is working with national experts to ensure that it is maximizing its water treatment options to the best of its ability. We are also working with the city’s Health Department.

PWD’s customers may find information of our progress and programs at our website at: www.phila.gov/water.

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