August 8, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on theproposed 3M Chemical Operations (Cottage Grove) – Wastewater Permit**.**

Clean Water Action has worked in Minnesota since 1982, focusing on finding solutions to health, consumer, environmental, and community problems; developing strong, community-based environmental leadership; and working for policies that improve lives and protect water. Our focus includes supporting environmental justice; protecting and restoring the Great Lakes for Minnesota; and ensuring safer chemicals for use in our homes and daily lives, as well as source and toxics reduction in plastics and other forms of waste. All our work culminates in the overarching goal of protecting the water we drink for generations to come.

Clean Water Action Minnesota has been a leader in the effort to end the use of PFAS chemicals in consumer products and firefighting foam as well as the creation of an information disclosure process for products sold in Minnesota containing PFAS. Now that Minnesota has successfully passed Amara’s Law to turn off the tap of new PFAS entering the waste stream, we must address both the PFAS currently in the environment and the PFAS 3M is releasing into the Mississippi River with its wastewater. Reducing the PFAS that enters the environment and addressing clean up must happen as a partnership to properly protect our water for future generations.

We have two main items to highlight regarding the draft permit. We appreciate the aggressive approach of the permit but suggest expanding upon how public notices will occur and clarifying what “destruction” means.

1. Public notice of meetings – On Page 46 of the draft permit there is a requirement for a public meeting based on Minn. R. 7001. This means that “The commissioner shall publish the notice in a newspaper of general circulation in the geographical area of the facility or activity which is the subject of the permit application, and shall mail a copy of the notice to the applicant, the appropriate city and county officials, and all other persons determined by the commissioner to have an interest in the permit application. If applicable, the commissioner shall comply with part [7001.0670](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/7001.0670), subpart 3”.
   1. We encourage the Commissioner to post the notice in multiple newspapers to ensure the notice is seen by as many people as possible. We also encourage additional outreach such as direct mail, text messages, and phone calls to the residents most likely to be impacted by exposure to remind them of the meeting. It is essential to use various types of outreach so residents of all ages, capabilities, income levels, and language abilities are reached. Engaging community partners to help share the meeting information would also increase awareness and attendance.   
        
      Many impacted residents may work untraditional hours or need childcare to attend. It is our hope that meetings can be adjusted to ensure as many people as possible attend. This could mean in-person meetings with a virtual option held in the morning and in the evening, both of which should include free childcare.   
        
      Because of the diversity within the community, we also encourage having interpreters onsite at meetings and documents prepared with multiple applicable translations so that all residents feel included and have access to the same education as English speakers. Refraining from confusing jargon is also a helpful way to make all residents feel welcome and able to grasp the scope of the conversation.  
        
      Finally, if the meeting is held during mealtime, providing food and beverages may create a more welcoming environment for residents and encourage attendance.   
        
      These public meetings are important, and these steps will help ensure that as many residents as possible are notified in a meaningful way and that they aren’t faced with barriers to attendance.
2. Destruction and disposal of PFAS removed from wastewater.
   1. Pages 46 and 91 both address the “destruction” of the PFAS removed from the wastewater that the 3M Cottage Grove facility is discharging into the Mississippi River. Incorrect disposal of PFAS can create dangerous consequences for the environment and those employed at facilities engaged in the destruction of the PFAS.   
        
      Page 46 says “The Permittee must also report where the captured PFAS is sent for disposal and whether that PFAS is fully destroyed.” Page 91 says “The Permittee must also report where the captured PFAS is sent for disposal and whether that PFAS is fully destroyed.” The permit does not clearly articulate what destruction means, what safety parameters must be followed, and what environmental consequences must be considered with regards to the destruction of PFAS. We encourage this portion of the permit to be built out to clarify what “destruction” means and to define the corresponding safety requirements related to destruction.  
        
      Our concern stems from the fact that inadequate methods of incineration for PFAS cause a toxic greenhouse gas that is incredibly harmful to the environment. It is our position that 3M should be transparent and disclose the destruction technology being used, the safety measures taken to protect workers, the resulting biproducts created from destruction, and how those byproducts are disposed of.

Thanks to an [MPCA study,](https://www.pca.state.mn.us/news-and-stories/groundbreaking-study-shows-unaffordable-costs-of-pfas-cleanup-from-wastewater) we know that the cost of removing PFAS from wastewater throughout the state could cost Minnesota taxpayers up to $20 billion over the next 20 years. We also know that even one life lost due to an illness linked to toxic chemical exposure is too high of a cost to pay. A strong permit for the 3M Cottage Grove facility is vital to protecting both taxpayer dollars and human health. We do not feel this cost burden should fall on taxpayers. Rather we feel strongly that polluters should be addressing this crisis across the state.

Minnesota continues to be a global leader in our approach to protecting residents from toxic PFAS chemicals. We are grateful for the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency’s strong approach to tackling this crisis head on with consistency and transparency.

Sincerely,



Avonna Starck

Clean Water Action

Minnesota State Director