Buffalo County DHHS
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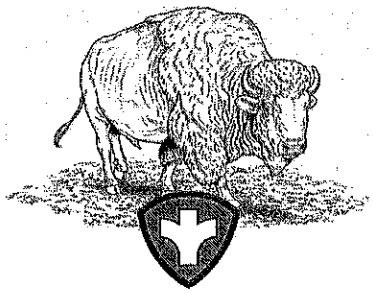

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Buffalo County Health Department

Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Memo

DATE: September 19, 2012

TO: Buffalo County DHHS & Veteran's Committee

FROM: Health Officer Jen Rombalski

RE: Moratorium Recommendations

The purpose of this memo is to share with you the events that have occurred following the 8/28/12 DHHS & Veteran's Committee meeting that will explain the attached recommendations regarding the moratorium.

On 9/4/12, the Public Health Response and Recommendations approved by this Committee were presented to the County Board. The County Board voted to forward the reports back to Committee. I was instructed that this meant the Public Health Response and Recommendations would go to Zoning.

On 9/5/12, I attended the Western Regional WI Association of Local Health Departments and Boards (WALHDAB) meeting where, among other things, I learned that LaCrosse County would not likely be able to complete the application for a grant to conduct a health impact analysis on industrial sand mining. On 9/6/12, I participated in a multi-state (MN and WI) webcast on silica, sand, and health impact analysis. Also on this date, I received an invitation and set up an appointment to tour a sand mining facility in Northern Buffalo County (toured on 9/11/12).

In addition to the aforementioned, I had contact and/or discussion with and received new information from the following: a County Board member, citizens, and Dr. Crispin Pierce from UW-Eau Claire (received feedback and suggestions for improvement to our Recommendations).

On 9/14/12, Lori and I met with a geologist from Milestone Materials and the Environmental Manager for Mathy Construction (who had contacted us after the DHHS

& Veteran's Committee meeting on 8/28/12). The representatives provided us with details regarding a study being conducted on air quality. The air quality monitoring protocol comes from Dr. John Richards in California and has been approved by WI DNR and upgraded to their recommendations (ie-added a weather tower). Three facilities (EOG, Mathy, and Fairmont) are participating in the study using the same protocol, but all are participating blind to each other to increase outcome credibility. Mathy has begun air sampling and monitoring as of 9/1/12 and will complete this on 9/1/13. This is the first air quality study being conducted in the area on industrial sand mining.

On Thursday, 9/13/12, my Director (Paula) informed me that Tom Taylor, Zoning Committee Chair, was requesting that I present a written or oral report at the 9/19/12 Zoning Committee meeting on our recommendation to extend the moratorium. He asked that I provide detail about the moratorium length and tasks to be accomplished during that time.

These events – specifically, learning that (1) there would be no grant application to conduct a study or health impact analysis through La Crosse County as previously thought, and (2) there would be no data available from the EOG/Mathy/Fairmont study nor any other study by December 2012, as we had been led to believe (best estimate for release of study data is March 2014) – have changed my recommendations. Therefore, my report must go back through our Committee for review, discussion and action prior to being presented to the Zoning Committee. A memo stating this fact was forwarded by our Department to the Zoning Committee.

Requested Committee actions:

1. After reviewing my report and rationale, I ask that you approve it in its entirety and forward it to the Zoning Committee.

2. We currently do not have capacity in Public Health to accomplish the four actions suggested at the end of my report. If the committee believes these actions should be tasked to Public Health, I request discussion on how we can increase capacity to complete them thoroughly and adequately.

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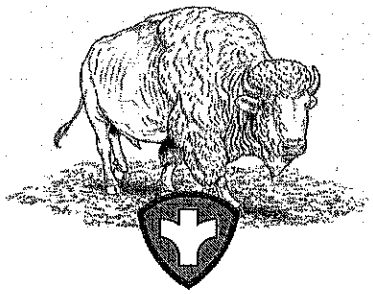

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As the highest health official in county government for Buffalo County, the Health Officer, my primary responsibility is to, whenever possible, protect the health and safety of residents, prevent disease and injury, and promote overall health. My knowledge and expertise does not lie in air quality monitoring, but in assessing and planning for population-based health such as in protecting and advocating for healthy environments.

Given all information I have received and processed thus far and to uphold this mission to prevent, promote, and protect, it is clear to me that we should prove industrial sand mining operations (separated from mining construction aggregate) to be safe before forging ahead. Thus, a moratorium extension is warranted to protect health and safety. Information used to make this decision includes:

1. There is potential that industrial sand mining operations could increase particulates, including those of a very small size which are linked to negative health effects.
2. There is no proof that air quality is not negatively impacted by industrial sand mining operations.

The timeframe for the moratorium should be based on the length of time it will take to prove that industrial sand mining is safe. There is one air quality study being conducted by Dr. John Richards, a California researcher in conjunction with 3 area companies engaged in industrial sand mining (EOG, Fairmont, and Mathey). This study focuses on air quality, specifically silica, and includes air sampling from approximately September 2012 to September 2013. It is estimated that study results could be available within 6 months (March 2014) from the time sampling concludes. The results of this study should, at a minimum, help fill the gap of information relating to air quality safety.

In addition to waiting for the results of the study, other actions could include:

1. Finding and connecting experts from government, academia, and industry to discuss the issue including concerns and future action.
2. Bringing experts into the county to share knowledge and expertise with governing bodies and community members.
3. Collaborating more closely with zoning to share information and discuss opportunities and possibilities for protecting resident health and safety.
4. Seeking answers to our many questions. For example, in regards to site-specific air quality monitoring, if this should occur, how would the data be collected and analyzed to ensure reliability and validity, and how should the data be used for decision-making?