



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Jan. 18, 2011

Contact: Ann Potempa, 907-269-7957, Cell 907-230-4001
ann.potempa@alaska.gov
Greg Wilkinson, 907- 269-7285, Cell 907-382-7032
gregory.wilkinson@alaska.gov

Tests results released from sulfolane garden project

Small project looks at a handful of North Pole gardens

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Final results from a North Pole garden sampling project reaffirmed that some edible garden plants retain sulfolane from tainted well water. When detected, sulfolane levels varied depending on the type of plant and part of the plant tested. The project's aim was to give feedback to gardeners using water affected by sulfolane — an industrial solvent found in wells near the Flint Hills refinery in October 2009.

“Although this second round of tests revealed sulfolane in some — but not all — garden plants at relatively low levels, we still have concerns about using sulfolane-affected water for gardening,” said Nim Ha, acting Environmental Public Health Program Manager with the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Section of Epidemiology.

The results were based on the testing of 23 types of plants from seven North Pole gardens. Sulfolane was found in the leaves, roots, stems, fruits, and flowers of various plants. The edible parts of a dozen tested plants showed no detectable level of sulfolane. They include:

- Crab apple
- Green onion
- Radish root
- Rhubarb stem
- Romaine lettuce
- Shucking peas
- String beans
- Summer squash
- Swiss chard (leaf and stem)
- White onion
- Zucchini blossom

“Based on the small number of gardens and samples tested, and without knowing the long-term health risks of sulfolane, we can’t just say with 100-percent certainty that using sulfolane-affected water for growing fruits and vegetables is OK,” said Ha. “We recommend that folks use sulfolane-free water whenever possible for gardening.”

Flint Hills has offered to supply above-ground water tanks for gardening this coming summer, and will be contacting homeowners in the next couple of months to discuss this and other long-term options for household drinking water.

A fact sheet that summarizes the results of the North Pole garden sampling project is available online at

<http://www.epi.alaska.gov/eh/sulfolane/DHSSGardenSamplingFinalResultsFactSheet.pdf>.

For more information about sulfolane contamination in North Pole groundwater, go to

<http://dec.alaska.gov/spar/csp/sites/north-pole-refinery/>.