



MAYORS CALL FOR ACCELERATED ACTION TO PROTECT DRINKING WATER FROM TOXIC ALGAE

Racine, WI December 5, 2014 -- Mayors of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative (Cities Initiative) at their Board of Directors meeting at the Johnson Foundation at Wingspread today called for accelerated action to protect drinking water from toxic algae in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence. The Cities Initiative is writing to President Barack Obama, Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Ohio Governor John Kasich, Indiana Governor Mike Pence, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder, Premier Kathleen Wynne of Ontario and Premier Philippe Couillard of Quebec to call for the formation of a Strategic Alliance among governments and stakeholders to chart a path forward.

“As mayors of Great Lakes cities, we don’t want to be forced to shut down our drinking water systems next summer the way Mayor Collins of Toledo had to this past August,” said Mayor John Dickert of Racine, current Chair of the Cities Initiative. “We need to work together on this problem before it affects our families and our children.”

Recognizing the importance of working closely with agriculture to address rural runoff, Mayor Randy Hope of Chatham-Kent, Ontario, and director on the board of the Cities Initiative, said, “Agriculture is an important part of the Great Lakes economy and way of life, and mayors of our organization want to sit down with farmers to see how we can work together to solve this problem.”

Progress has been made in addressing the problems of algal blooms in lakes in Quebec in recent years. Salaberry-de-Valleyfield Mayor Denis Lapointe, director on the board of the Cities Initiative, said, “We are part of this tremendous fresh water system, and we are prepared to bring our experience and ideas from Quebec to help solve this problem.”

Work is underway by all orders of government and in the agricultural sector, but the Toledo water crisis demonstrated the need for a greater sense of urgency and better integration of efforts. The Strategic Alliance will be the catalyst for action to: 1). Set guidelines and advisories for dealing with toxic microcystin bacteria in drinking water; 2). Accelerate limits on phosphorus runoff into the Great Lakes; and 3). Accelerate immediate actions to reduce loadings.

The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement between the US and Canada calls for target concentrations, loadings, and allocations of phosphorus in Lake Erie by 2016, and domestic plans to meet targets by 2018. The International Joint Commission (IJC) released a Lake Erie Ecosystem Priority (LEEP) report in August of 2013 with specific actions and target reductions of phosphorus. In addition, the State of Ohio established the Ohio Lake Erie Task Force which came out with a series of recommendations in



November 2013. The Great Lakes Commission also called for formation of a working group recently to address this problem. Notwithstanding these longer term efforts, mayors are calling for more immediate actions and concrete reductions in phosphorous loadings.

Regarding microcystin bacteria in drinking water, the US Environmental Protection Agency is moving forward with a new health advisory and Health Canada is in the process of updating the guidelines in Canada. The Cities Initiative is pleased that these are moving forward and would like to see final action on these before the summer of 2015. Also, local governments and water utilities need an opportunity to consult in the development of these to make sure they address sampling, monitoring, analytical methods, treatment strategies, and response protocols.

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative is an alliance of 114 U.S. and Canadian cities representing over 17 million people in efforts to protect and restore the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence and ensure the long term economic, social, and environmental sustainability of the largest source of surface fresh water in the world.

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