

News Release

For Immediate Release

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URI Superfund research center to host event in Hyannis to educate residents about industrial contaminants, June 7

NARRAGANSETT, R.I. -- May 23, 2018 – Residents in the Barnstable County, Mass., area are encouraged to join with scientists and others from the University of Rhode Island, Harvard University and the Silent Spring Institute at an event to learn more about the industrial contaminants affecting the region and the efforts to study them.

STEEP Science Day at the Barnstable Town Hall will run from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Thursday, June 7. The event is free and open to the public. Light refreshments will be available.

The event will focus on sharing information about a group of industrial compounds called perfluoroalkyl substances and polyfluoroalkyl substances, together called PFASs. Manufactured since the 1950s, the compounds are used in numerous consumer products, as well as in firefighting foams, and their serious health effects are only now beginning to emerge. Some residents of Barnstable County have been affected by the compounds through their drinking water, which became contaminated with PFASs as a result of firefighting foams used at Joint Base Cape Cod and the county fire training academy.

“We look forward to engaging with the Cape Cod community, providing updates about our scientific efforts, and listening to concerns,” said URI Professor Rainer Lohmann, who leads the University’s Superfund research center, called STEEP – Sources, Transport, Exposure and Effects of PFASs.

The event will begin with the screening of a film called “The Island and the Whales,” which highlights a community in the Faroe Islands of northern Europe where the STEEP team is also working. Residents there are reducing their traditional consumption of whale meat due to health concerns related to PFASs and other contaminants in the whales.

Harvard Professor Phillippe Grandjean, who is leading the work in the Faroe Islands, will be in attendance at the Hyannis event to share his insights and answer questions.

Several presentations will be offered by members of the STEEP team beginning at 12:30. Topics include the status of a lawsuit against PFAS-manufacturer 3M, updates on research under way, and how local residents can participate in a well water testing program.

From 3 to 4:30 p.m., participants may tour the Hyannis Water System treatment plant to learn about PFAS reduction efforts, hear updates from graduate students about ongoing research, or engage in a discussion about community information needs.

Throughout the day, attendees are invited to view a poster display outlining some of the research being conducted on PFASs, including the development of detection tools, environmental fingerprinting, childhood risks and metabolic effects.

“It will be an informal event where people can enjoy lunch on the town hall lawn, talk with their neighbors and the scientists, and hopefully go away with a better understanding of the issues facing the community,” Lohmann said.

STEPP Science Day is sponsored by the STEEP team, which includes URI, the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and the Silent Spring Institute. Community partners for the event include the Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition and the Sierra Club’s Cape Cod Group.

For more information, visit <https://web.uri.edu/steep>.

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