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# Report outlines additional threats to Elk River water

By Ken Ward Jr.

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- A new report from the West Virginia Rivers Coalition and the consulting firm Downstream Strategies identifies more potential threats of contamination to the Elk River, the drinking water supply for 300,000 state residents.

The report, based on new information from state regulators, lists 63 potential pollution threats, more than the 52 that were contained in a decade-old report published by the state Department of Health and Human Resources.

Forty commercial, 17 industrial and five municipal facilities -- everything from above-ground storage tanks to wells producing natural gas -- are on the list of "potential significant contamination sources," or PSCSs.

The new information, provided by DHHR's Bureau for Public Health, did not provide names of the businesses or, in many cases, addresses for the potential contamination sources. Downstream Strategies and the Rivers Coalition used computer mapping and on-the-ground investigation to try to identify the sources.

The report said that more information is needed to officially update the list of potential contamination sources, to be sure which deserve to be listed and which do not.

"Once inventories of PSCSs are updated, there is no single solution available to minimize the risk

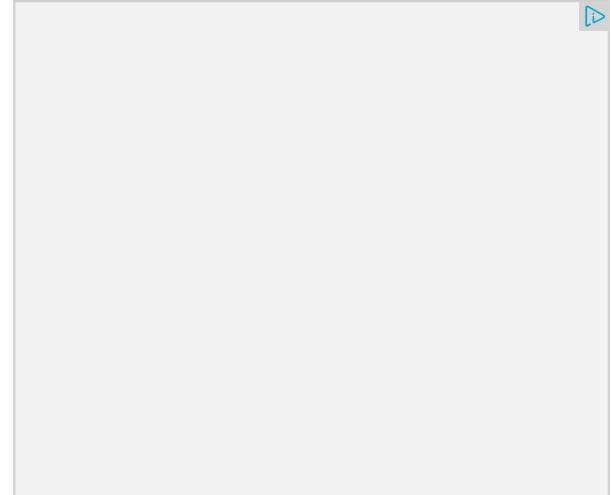
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that they present to public water intakes," the report said. "Water utilities, local governments, local emergency planning committees, and other organizations or individuals can all take actions to protect source water from contamination."

The report concludes, "While this report focuses on the PSCSs and water resources permits above WVAW's Elk River intake, the circumstances that led to contamination of the Elk River are examples of what could happen to many communities if they do not engage in proper planning and if regulatory agencies do not provide proper oversight."

"In some cases, tighter regulations are also warranted," the report said. "Populations in Morgantown, Huntington, and cities and towns across the state are at risk if PSCSs are not accurately identified, and if risks from these sites are not managed."

This is the second report that the Rivers Coalition and Downstream Strategies have produced since the Jan. 9 chemical spill at Freedom Industries. The first report brought widespread public attention to the regulatory failures at the heart of the water crisis, and proposed a series of potential reforms.

"Our goal is to provide data and information so that state leaders can make the most informed decisions possible to prevent future spills and to upgrade the protection of public water intakes across the state," said Evan Hansen, president of Downstream Strategies.

"Citizens question why facilities such as the Freedom site are allowed to be located immediately upstream from drinking water intakes," said Angie Rosser, executive director of the Rivers Coalition. "This report is a next step in understanding all of the threats to our water and what needs to be done to make sure we are better protected from the wide range of potential hazards."

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