



*February 26, 2016*

## **Facts about PFOA for residents of North Bennington**

### **Background**

The Agency of Natural Resources/Department of Environmental Conservation tested a number of water sources near the former Chemfab plant in North Bennington, and results show varying levels of a potentially harmful chemical, perfluorooctanoic acid, or PFOA. The public water supply has been tested and is not affected, but five other residential and commercial wells had test results ranging from 40 to nearly 2,500 parts per trillion (ppt). Additional residential wells in the area that may have been affected will be tested.

### **What is PFOA?**

PFOA is a manufactured chemical that belongs to a group of chemicals used to make household and commercial products that resist heat and chemical reactions, and repel oil, stains, grease and water. These chemicals are widely found in nonstick cookware, stain-resistant carpets and fabrics, water repellent clothing, paper and cardboard food packaging and fire-fighting foam.

PFOA does not break down easily and therefore persists for a very long time in the environment, especially in water. Its toxicity and persistence in the environment means it is a potential danger to human health and the environment.

### **Why is PFOA contamination a health concern?**

PFOA is a health concern because, if ingested over time, it could lead to health effects including liver toxicity, kidney damage, increased risk for cardiovascular disease, adverse effects on the reproductive system, immune system, infant and child development, and possibly some cancers, specifically testicular, prostate, thyroid and kidney cancer.

The Vermont Department of Health has established a health level of 20 parts per trillion (ppt) for drinking water. If water contains more than 20 ppt, it should not be used for drinking, food preparation, cooking, tooth brushing, or any other way it could be ingested.

### **How can I get my private well tested?**

Contact Chuck Schwer at the Department of Environmental Conservation by calling 802-828-1138 (switchboard), or 802-249-5324 (cell) or by emailing [chuck.schwer@vermont.gov](mailto:chuck.schwer@vermont.gov).

Laboratories in Vermont are not equipped to test for PFOA. The Department of Environmental Conservation will collect water samples to send to an out-of-state lab for this specialized testing.

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**If my well water is contaminated with PFOA, or I am concerned about possible contamination with PFOA –**

**Should I drink the water?**

No. Use bottled water or water from a known safe source for drinking, food preparation, cooking, brushing teeth – any way that you could ingest the water. The Department of Environmental Conservation is distributing bottled water to residences that have PFOA detected, and those potentially affected but not yet tested.

The public drinking water supply in North Bennington has been tested and is not affected.

**Is it OK to shower or bathe?**

Routine showering or bathing would not likely cause a significant exposure. Studies have shown very limited absorption of PFOA through the skin.

As a precaution, we recommend shorter showers, and use of bathroom fans (or opening bathroom windows) to help remove water droplets (aerosols) formed during showering. The shorter the shower, the lower the possible exposure to PFOA-contaminated water. We also recommend that children or people with skin conditions (rashes, cuts, abrasions, etc.) avoid prolonged contact with PFOA-contaminated water in the bath. Children are more likely to swallow while playing.

**What about brushing teeth?**

Use bottled water for brushing teeth.

**Can I do laundry and wash my dishes?**

Yes. Doing laundry or washing dishes is not likely to pose a significant exposure to PFOA. If washing dishes by hand, you can minimize exposure by wearing rubber gloves, especially if you have a rash, cuts or abrasions on your hands.

**Can I use a humidifier?**

If you must use a humidifier, only use water from a safe source.

**Would an in-home treatment system help filter PFOA out of the water?**

If your water has tested positive for PFOA, the Department of Environmental Conservation will be coordinating the installation of in-home water treatment.

Carbon filtration and reverse osmosis are two technologies that can remove organic contaminants such as PFOA from water. While there are currently no commercially available point-of-use filters (filters attached to a tap), or whole house filters specifically certified by the National Sanitation Foundation to remove PFOA, any activated carbon or reverse osmosis system should be able to reduce PFOA levels. The Minnesota Department of Health tested several point of use water treatment devices and found many to be effective.

If a treatment system is used, it is important to follow the manufacturer's guidelines for maintenance and operation – and periodic testing of the treated water would be necessary to ensure that the PFOA level stays below the health advisory for drinking water.

**Will it be OK to eat produce from my garden, or fish from the Walloomsac river?**

Soil and river water have not yet been tested for PFOA. We know people have many questions about this, and the Health Department is reviewing the science to help answer these questions.

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**PFOA and Human Health**

**Is PFOA found in humans?**

Studies show that human exposure to PFOA is widespread, and that most people have low levels of PFOA in their blood. PFOA does not break down in the human body and stays in blood for years after exposure, so levels of PFOA detected by a special blood test would reflect total exposure over many years. The time it takes for PFOA blood levels to go down by half is about two to four years, assuming there is no additional exposure to the chemical.

**What health effects are associated with exposure to PFOA?**

PFOA ingested over time could lead to health effects including liver toxicity, kidney damage, increased risk for cardiovascular disease, adverse effects on the reproductive system, immune system, infant and child development, and possibly some cancers, specifically testicular, prostate, thyroid and kidney cancer.

**Is there a medical test that can tell me if I have been exposed to PFOA?**

Yes. PFOA can be measured in blood, but the test is not routinely done. PFOA would be expected at low levels in the blood of almost all Americans. The results of blood tests can be used to determine if a person's PFOA blood level is lower than, similar to, or higher than blood lead levels found in the general population.

**When should I see a health care provider?**

If PFOA is detected in your water, or if you or family members have signs or symptoms that you think are caused by PFOA exposure, discuss your concerns with your family's health care provider. The Health Department is providing health care providers in the area with information about recommended clinical blood tests.

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**For questions about potential health effects of PFOA:**

Call the Department of Health toll-free at 800-439-8550.

This fact sheet will be posted on the Health Department's website at [healthvermont.gov](http://healthvermont.gov), and information will be updated as we have more facts.

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