

South Jersey town's drinking water exceeded a 'forever chemical' standard

December 15 2021, by Frank Kummer



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

The Willingboro Municipal Utilities Authority is notifying residents that drinking water recently exceeded a state level set for PFOS, one of the "forever chemicals" that do not break down in the body or environment.

The MUA said PFOS was detected at 15 parts per trillion based on a running annual average. The state allowable maximum is 13 ppt. The agency, which also provides water for neighboring Westampton Township, posted the notice Dec. 8 on its website.

Officials for the MUA could not be reached immediately Tuesday for comment.

However, the MUA was advising people with compromised immune systems, those who are pregnant or have infants, and the elderly that they may be at higher risk than others and "should seek advice from your [health care providers](#) about [drinking](#) this water."

Simply boiling the water won't remove the PFOS, the notice says. Infant formulas and other drinks served to infants should be prepared with bottled water. Pregnant or nursing women should consider using bottled water for drinking and cooking.

The agency notes that home filters are available that effectively reduce PFOS.

According to the MUA, monitoring began this year under the state's new standards for some compounds that fall under the family of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances known collectively as PFAS. PFOS is within that family.

The MUA said it was notified Nov. 8 that the four most recent quarters of monitoring had shown "that our system exceeds" PFOS levels.

The compounds are associated with health issues such as problems with the immune and endocrine systems and also affect cholesterol levels. But the effects are not yet fully known.

New Jersey's maximum allowable levels are well below federal Environmental Protection Agency guidance of 70 ppt. However, the EPA has not formally adopted maximum levels. Pennsylvania is in the process of setting its own standards.

Last month, the EPA under the Biden administration pledged to take steps to regulate the toxic chemicals used in everyday products that have contaminated drinking water nationwide. The administration wants enforceable standards that limit the chemicals in drinking water and designates some as hazardous substances. But the process won't be complete until the end of 2023.

Prior to the PFOS exceedance, the Willingboro MUA had already hired an engineering firm, the Alaimo Group, to install an activated carbon system large enough to filter the water produced by one of its wells. The MUA plans to keep that well, known as 5A, shut down until the PFOS level is once again in compliance, or the new filtration system is installed. It said the process could take two years, but it did not identify the possible source.

PFOS was widely used in metal plating and finishing as well as in firefighting foams, stain-resistant coatings for upholstery and carpets, water-resistant outdoor clothing, and greaseproof food packaging.

Major sources in drinking [water](#) include discharges from industrial facilities and places where firefighting foam was routinely used, such as military bases.

A state Department of Environmental Protection report says Willingboro has seven wells, and the main source is the Potomac-Raritan-Magothy aquifer.

The MUA's most recent Consumer Confidence Report for 2020 filed

with the EPA showed no other violations.

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