

PFAS in Private Wells near the Saint-Gobain Site in Merrimack, New Hampshire

Summary - Health Consultation for Public Comment

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) has released for public comment a draft report evaluating public health effects of exposure to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in private drinking water wells near the Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics facility in Merrimack, New Hampshire. The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NH DES) and New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (NH DHHS) asked ATSDR to do this evaluation.

The Saint-Gobain facility used several PFAS, including perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), in its processes. In 2016, PFOA was found in groundwater near the site. Since then, NH DES has led sampling of public water systems and private wells in five New Hampshire towns surrounding the Saint-Gobain facility (Merrimack, Litchfield, Londonderry, Bedford, and Manchester). State and local officials have taken several actions to reduce exposures, including treating public water supplies and providing alternate or treated water to affected private well owners.

Since 2016, ATSDR staff have been working with the state to provide health information to the public regarding PFAS exposure. In 2019, the state provided ATSDR PFAS data from public and private drinking water supplies. The state provided additional data from private wells in April 2021. ATSDR will release a separate report evaluating data from public water supplies in the area.

This fact sheet summarizes the findings of ATSDR's evaluation of private well data and tells how to submit comments on the report. You can find the report at: <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/HAC/pha/StGobainPlastics/St-Gobain-PFAS-HC-PC-508.pdf>.



Key Findings

Before actions began in 2016 to reduce exposures, drinking private well water contaminated with PFAS could have increased the risk for harmful health effects for some community members.

- Most of the private wells evaluated in the five towns of Merrimack, Litchfield, Londonderry, Bedford, and Manchester were contaminated with PFAS. PFOA was detected most frequently and at the highest concentrations.
 - » Based on ATSDR's evaluation of both individual PFAS and PFAS mixture effects detailed in the report, more than 230 out of 2,745 wells had PFAS at levels that could harm infants or young children, and about 9% of those wells had levels that could harm all age groups. Developmental effects are the most likely possible health effects from exposure, and the risk of developmental effects would increase as PFAS levels and exposure increased. Immune or liver effects would also be possible from exposure to the highest PFAS levels.
 - » Other sources of PFAS exposure (such as from food or consumer products) could increase the risk of harmful health effects beyond the risk from the drinking water exposures alone.
- The remaining wells, with lower or no detections of PFAS, are not expected to have harmed health. However, this conclusion is uncertain. Many wells were sampled only once, and the actual PFAS levels could have fluctuated over time. Also, knowledge about health effects of the PFAS evaluated is still evolving, and many wells contained other PFAS which have not been studied enough to evaluate the potential for health effects.



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- The increased risk of developing cancer from exposure to PFAS in the area is uncertain. There is suggestive evidence that both PFOA and PFOS are carcinogenic, but the science on PFOA, PFOS, and other PFAS is too limited at this time to quantify risk.

Currently, harmful exposures to PFAS in private wells have been minimized by providing alternate water and taking other actions. People who continue to drink contaminated, untreated private well water may still have an increased risk for harmful health effects.

- Since 2016, bottled water has been provided to residents whose private wells were affected by PFAS. More than 750 private wells in the area have been switched to treated public water or equipped with point-of-entry treatment systems which are regularly tested for treatment effectiveness.
- Some private wells with low levels of PFAS, or wells with no detections, may remain in use. Based on the current science, harmful health effects are unlikely if PFAS concentrations in those wells remain low. Residents drinking from private wells that were never tested, or who were offered but declined alternate water, may experience harmful health effects if they drink water with high PFAS concentrations.

ATSDR Recommendations

- Private well owners who had potentially harmful exposures in the past should discuss their exposure with their health care provider and consider taking steps to reduce other potential PFAS exposures, such as those from consumer products containing PFAS.
- Residents should reduce exposure from background sources of PFAS by avoiding or limiting the use of products containing PFAS. Examples of products that may contain PFAS include food packing materials, stain resistant carpets, water resistant clothing, cleaning products, and some cosmetics.
- ATSDR recommends nursing mothers continue to breastfeed and contact their healthcare providers with specific concerns. ATSDR is available to consult with healthcare providers as needed. To help protect formula-fed infants from potential exposure, caregivers should use pre-mixed formula or reconstitute dry formula with water sources not containing PFAS.
- Residents using point-of-entry treatment systems to remove PFAS from private well water should have the systems maintained and checked periodically to ensure removal effectiveness.

- Residents continuing to drink from private wells should monitor their well water quality and should work with local authorities to take appropriate action to remove harmful contaminants, if needed.
- ATSDR will work with NH DES and NH DHHS to identify any private wells with PFAS levels of concern that have not been addressed through previous actions.

ATSDR is available to discuss individual results with private well owners, and we will continue to be available, upon request, to answer other public health questions related to the site.

Next Steps

To read the report with ATSDR's additional conclusions and recommendations, visit <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/HAC/pha/StGobainPlastics/St-Gobain-PFAS-HC-PC-508.pdf>. Copies of the report can also be reviewed during regular business hours at Merrimack Town Hall, 6 Baboosic Lake Road, Merrimack, NH 03054. ATSDR is exploring options for sharing our findings with the community in virtual availability sessions or otherwise. We will inform the community in advance when these occur.

You can help improve the quality of this report by providing feedback. Email your comments by March 1, 2022 to ATSDRRecordsCenter@cdc.gov or mail them to us at ATSDR Records Center, 4770 Buford Highway NE, Mailstop: S-102-2, Chamblee, GA 30341.

Written comments received during the public comment period and ATSDR responses will appear in an appendix to the final report. The report will not include the names of people submitting comments. However, names may be releasable if ATSDR receives a U.S. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request.



Where to Learn More

ATSDR: www.atsdr.cdc.gov

ATSDR PFAS and Your Health:
<https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfas/>

For questions about ATSDR activities at this site, community members can call 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636), email www.cdc.gov/info, or visit <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/HAC/pha/StGobainPlastics/St-Gobain-PFAS-HC-PC-508.pdf>.