

ECOWATCH

What is lurking in your water?

■ BY DELORES SAVAS

“PFAs pose a risk even at very low levels.

There are almost no safe levels of forever chemicals”

Environmental Protection Agency

Last week the EPA issued a warning that 87 toxic sites nationwide were classified as containing “forever chemicals,” many of them affecting Florida’s drinking water. Now finally the EPA will issue stricter guidelines ahead of plans to adopt national drinking water standards next year.

North Carolina’s Attorney General Josh Stein said, “For decades manufacturers of PFAs (perfluoroalkoxy alkanes) have gotten away with the contamination of our water and our environment and harming our health. This cannot stand. North Carolina has seen firsthand how dangerous PFAs can be. I’m doing everything in my power to protect the air we breathe and the water we drink, but we need stronger federal protection against these forever chemicals. That is why I’m calling on Congress to take legislative action to protect people.”

Sad to say, this action by Attorney General Stein is admirable, but it may be too late. When chemicals have been stamped as “forever chemicals,” that is exactly what they are. No magic wand will make them disappear. The only consolation, if there is one, is learning how to live with what has been so carelessly pushed on the public by manufacturers since the early 1900s and hope that the lawmakers of today will now halt the use of the contaminants in everyday products.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection reported in February 2021 that it found PFAs in

three sampled public supply wells, 22 sampled fire training facilities, 15 sampled dry-cleaning sites, 20 current and former federal facilities and 27 other sites. As well, the Naval Air Station in Jacksonville is among scores of Florida sites contaminated with PFAs.

Many people are not aware of what PFA chemicals are or that they are in almost every product and have contaminated our water supply. Scientists have linked some PFAs to cancers, liver damage, low birth rate, mothers’ milk and other health problems. PFAs are also found in the dust in your homes. It has been recommended that dust be removed with a wet dust cloth.

These toxic chemicals have been used for decades in household products such as non-stick cookware, stain- and water-resistant textiles and in firefighting foam and industrial products as well as water-repellent sports gear and stain-resistant rugs, cosmetics and countless other consumer products. The chemical bonds are so strong that they do not degrade, or do so only slowly in the environment and remain in a person’s bloodstream indefinitely.

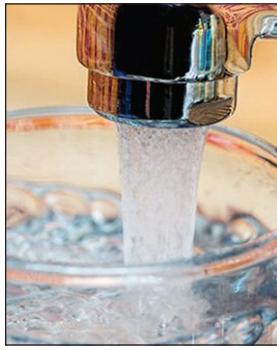
The EPA’s new health advisories slash lifetime safety limits on PFOA and PFOS from 70 parts per trillion (ppt) to nearly zero (0.0004 ppt and 002ppt, respectively).

“The announcement should set off alarm bells for consumers and regulators,” said Melanie Benesh, legislative attorney with the Environmental Working Group in a press statement. “These proposed advisory levels demonstrate that we must move much faster to dramatically reduce exposures to these toxic chemicals.”

The EPA has posted a leaflet enti-

led “Meaningful and Achievable Steps You Can Take to Reduce Your Risk.” Here is some of the advice they offer:

- Find out if PFAs are in your drinking water. “If you get your water from a public drinking water system, reach out to your local water utility to learn about how they may be addressing PFAs as well as ask them to test the water for PFAs or to share information with you if they have already tested the water. NOTE: Some public drinking water systems may not have this information. If you choose to test your water yourself, it is important to use



a state-certified laboratory using EPA-developed testing methods.

- PFAs can migrate from a mother’s blood into her breast milk, which may then expose breast-fed infants to PFAs. However, based on current science, the benefits of breast-feeding appear to outweigh the risk of exposure to PFAs by infants. It is best to consult with your doctor as to the risk versus the benefits of breast feeding.

- Contaminated fish. Avoid eating fish from waterways impacted by PFAs. You can determine which waterways are of concern by contacting your state or tribal fish advisory at fishadvisoryonline.epa.gov/contacts.aspx. It is important to follow fish consumption guidelines and avoid eating fish from waters contaminated with PFAs.

- Consumer products. Even though recent efforts to remove certain PFAs from commerce have reduced the likelihood of exposure, some household products and indoor dust may still contain PFAs. If you have any questions or concerns about products you use in your home, contact the Consumer Product Safety Commission at

cpsc.gov or call (800-638-2772).

According to Green Matters at greenmatters.com/p/pfas-list, “There isn’t much that can be done about PFAs, unfortunately. At this point, the chemicals are as ubiquitous as the water that they contaminate. Unless we learn to stop using such man-made toxins on our food, cookware and clothing, we’re kind of out of luck.”

The best we can do, at least according to the New Hampshire PFAs Investigation, is to “utilize water filtration systems in our homes. However, only granular-activated carbon or reverse-osmosis water filters will work on these tiny compounds.”

For the entire list of advisories and information on PFAs, access the EPA site at epa.gov/pfas/meaningful-and-available-steps-you-can-take-to-reduce-your-risk.

Animals are also affected by PFAs, according to wildlife.org. “PFAs have been linked with adverse health effects in lab animals, including reproduction, development, liver, kidney and immunological effects. That raises concerns for humans, but because these chemicals are often found in bodies of water and elsewhere in the environment, it raises concern for wildlife.”

In order to help curb PFA contaminants in the environment, contact your local congressional representatives and ask them to support laws to stop the use of PFAs in all products. We need all the support we can get.

SOURCES

Laura Cassels
Florida Phoenix-@floridaphoenix.com/2022/06/15/
EPA

email: gaiasvigil@gmail.com

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