



Department  
of Health

Department of  
Environmental Conservation

## FAQ: City of Newburgh PFOS Contamination *October 2016*

### **What is PFOS?**

Perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS) is a chemical manufactured in the United States from about 1949 until its phase out began in about 2000. PFOS was the key ingredient in Scotchgard®, a fabric protector made by 3M, and numerous stain repellents for clothing, upholstery, and carpets. PFOS was also used in paper, waxes, polishes, paints, varnishes, and cleaning products. In addition, PFOS has been a key ingredient in firefighting foam.

### **What is the source of the PFOS contamination in Newburgh?**

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has identified Stewart Air National Guard Base as a source of the PFOS contamination detected in the area and in the City of Newburgh public drinking water supply. DEC has listed the base as a state Superfund site and will use its full legal authority to ensure an expedited site clean-up. PFOS-containing firefighting foam has been used at the site for emergency response and training exercises. The state continues to investigate other areas at and near the Stewart property to determine if any other significant sources of PFOS contamination exist.

### **Is the City of Newburgh water okay to drink?**

Yes, the City's public water supply is clean and acceptable for all uses, including drinking, cooking, and bathing. Upon confirming the presence of PFOS in the City's drinking water, the state transitioned the City to a clean alternative supply called Brown's Pond in early May and to the Catskill Aqueduct in early June.

### **How did the state discover PFOS in the drinking water?**

The contamination was first detected and reported to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 2014 as part of the EPA Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule (UCMR) that requires large water supplies to test for select unregulated contaminants. From December 2013 to October 2014, the City collected four samples which had detections of PFOS ranging between 140 and 170 ppt and reported these results to the EPA and to the public in Annual Water Quality Reports.

As part of Governor Cuomo's Water Quality Rapid Response Team launched in February 2016, the New York State Department of Health (DOH) reviewed the EPA data in an effort to identify possible threats to drinking water quality across the state. Although all samples reported to the EPA were below the EPA's drinking water health advisory level of 200 ppt for PFOS in place at the time, the state engaged the City and sampled Newburgh's water system to confirm the presence of PFOS in March 2016. In May 2016, the EPA set the new advisory level of 70 ppt.

### **What does the U.S. EPA health advisory mean?**

In May 2016, the U.S. EPA set a health advisory level of 70 parts per trillion (ppt) for PFOS and related chemical perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) that provides a margin of protection against health effects from a lifetime of exposure to these chemicals in drinking water. Until May, the EPA had set provisional health advisory levels of 200 ppt for PFOS and 400 ppt for PFOA.

The difference between the advisory level and the level that might cause health effects is called the “margin of protection.” Health advisory levels are not “bright lines” between contaminant concentrations that might cause health effects and those that do not, but they are the level at which the EPA recommends that public water systems take steps to reduce exposure to PFOA and PFOS in the drinking water supply.

As explained in the EPA’s May 2016 Fact Sheet: “EPA’s health advisories are based on the best available peer-reviewed studies of the effects of PFOA and PFOS on laboratory animals (rats and mice) and were also informed by epidemiological studies of human populations that have been exposed to PFASs. These studies indicate that exposure to PFOA and PFOS over certain levels may result in adverse health effects, including developmental effects to fetuses during pregnancy or to breastfed infants (e.g., low birth weight, accelerated puberty, skeletal variations), cancer (e.g., testicular, kidney), liver effects (e.g., tissue damage), immune effects (e.g., antibody production and immunity), thyroid effects and other effects (e.g., cholesterol changes).”

For more information, visit: <https://www.epa.gov/ground-water-and-drinking-water/drinking-water-health-advisories-pfoa-and-pfos>

### **What is the state doing to ensure clean drinking water for City of Newburgh residents?**

The state has advanced a comprehensive and aggressive response to PFOS contamination in the Newburgh area. To date, the state has:

- Swiftly worked with the City to transition residents to a clean, alternative drinking water supply called Brown’s Pond in early May and to the Catskill Aqueduct in early June;
- Committed to fund all Catskill Aqueduct water payments and advanced the first \$2.4 million payment to the City in September;
- Committed to fund and started to construct a Granular Activated Carbon (GAC) system at the City of Newburgh water plant to remove PFOS from Lake Washington water that will be completed by the fall of 2017;
- Committed to fund and started to construct upgrades to the Catskill Aqueduct connection at the City of Newburgh’s alternate water source pump station that will be completed by winter 2016/2017;
- Conducted a comprehensive site investigation that identified Stewart Air National Guard Base as the likely source of PFOS contamination in the area due to the use of PFOS-containing firefighting foam;
- Listed Stewart Air National Guard Base as a state Superfund site in August to hold the U.S. Department of Defense responsible for full site clean-up;
- Launched an ongoing initiative to sample private wells in the Lake Washington area near the Town of New Windsor/Town of Newburgh border;
- Initiated an effort to lower the water level in Lake Washington—by pumping, filtering, and discharging clean water into the watershed—in order to ensure the integrity of the dam;
- Launched a fish sampling program to better understand the extent of contamination in the watershed; and
- Began an updated source water assessment for the watershed.

**Is there a blood testing program for people in the Newburgh area?**

Yes, the state Department of Health (DOH) has launched a comprehensive biomonitoring program for all interested residents in the Newburgh area that will serve as a national model for understanding PFOS exposure. DOH has been working closely with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), Newburgh community groups, and local elected officials to develop the program and ensure participation. If you are interested in learning more or having your blood tested, please e-mail [beoe@health.ny.gov](mailto:beoe@health.ny.gov), call 518-402-7950 during business hours, or call the Water Quality Hotline at 1-800-801-8092.

**Where can I get additional information?**

**For specific questions about blood testing**

Email: [beoe@health.ny.gov](mailto:beoe@health.ny.gov), ph: 518-402-7950 (Monday - Friday: 8:30 am - 4:30 pm)

**For specific questions about potential health effects of PFOS exposure**

Email: [btsa@health.ny.gov](mailto:btsa@health.ny.gov), ph: 518-402-7800 (Monday - Friday: 8:30 am - 4:30 pm)

**For specific questions about the public water supply**

Email: [bpwsp@health.ny.gov](mailto:bpwsp@health.ny.gov), ph: 518-402-7650 (Monday - Friday: 8:30 am - 4:30 pm)

**For specific questions about private wells**

Email: [beei@health.ny.gov](mailto:beei@health.ny.gov), ph: 518-402-7880 (Monday - Friday: 8:30 am - 4:30 pm)

**Water Quality Hotline: 800-801-8092**

(Monday - Friday: 9 am - 8 pm; Saturday: 9 am - 3 pm)

**If you have knowledge about contamination, please report it to the DEC hotline at 1-800-457-7362.**