



THE LEAGUE
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WHAT ARE PFAS AND WHY DO WE CARE?

Are you confused about PFAS and why they are getting so much attention? After doing some research, I know why I'm confused. As they say: "It's complicated!" Very complicated. Here are a few facts that might help.

PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) refers to a group of very strong man-made chemicals that have been manufactured since the 1940s. Their strength means that they can form a coating on surfaces that protects surfaces and reduces friction -- properties that have proved useful in many products and manufacturing processes. It also means that they remain in the environment and in our bodies for a very long time.

Some of the products containing PFAS include: linings of food packages (pizza boxes and microwave popcorn bags) because they can resist grease; nonstick coatings on pans (Teflon, for example); water and stain resistant products (Scotchgard™); polishes, waxes, paints, and cleaning products; and fire-fighting foam. While the manufacture of some PFAS (PFOA and PFOS) have been phased out in the United States, products containing these chemicals still come into the United States from other countries, and some types are still widely manufactured and used in the US. It is important to know that, while risks related to PFOA and PFOS have been extensively studied, there is much less information about the risks of the "replacement" chemicals in the PFAS group that includes thousands of chemicals. Some chemicals in the PFAS group are still being widely used.

Numerous studies have linked PFOA and PFOS to health problems such as low infant birth weight, developmental issues in infants and children, disruption of the thyroid and immune systems, increase in cholesterol levels, some types of cancer, and infertility issues in women. These studies have led to concerns about

using water supplies contaminated by PFAS. The major concerns are sites near military bases and factories where large quantities of PFAS were used. The July 31, 2018, issue of Bridge online magazine provides a map of contaminated sites in Michigan. (<https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-environment-watch/map-here-are-confirmed-pfas-threats-michigan-water>) The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) website also provides information about their investigation and response to the problem of contaminated water supplies. (<https://www.michigan.gov/pfasresponse/0,9038,7-365-86511---,00.html>)

To help address the disagreement of safe levels of PFOS and PFOAS in drinking water, in December 2017, Representative Winnie Brinks, along with a bipartisan group of state legislators, introduced HB 5375 to amend the Safe Water Drinking Act to set acceptable levels at 5 parts per trillion. The bill never received a hearing by the State House Committee on Natural Resources. The bill died at the end of the legislative session on December 31, 2018. Winnie Brinks, now a state senator, introduced the same text January 15, 2019 as SB 14. It has not been scheduled for a hearing. You can express your concerns about this issue to your legislators by going to:

[https://www.legislature.mi.gov/\(S\(syc3ycrcevg4ancmzc3djyh\)\)/mileg.aspx?page=legislators](https://www.legislature.mi.gov/(S(syc3ycrcevg4ancmzc3djyh))/mileg.aspx?page=legislators) to locate and contact your state representative and senator.

Much of the basic information in this article is from the EPA website at:

<https://www.epa.gov/pfas/basic-information-pfas>

An excellent summary of the issue, with a focus on what levels can be considered safe, can be found in the online Bridge Magazine at:

<https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-environment-watch/michigan-pfas-numbers-how-much-unsafe>