



TOWN OF WILMINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

Highway
Tree

Water & Sewer
Parks & Grounds

Engineering
Cemetery

Interoffice Memorandum

TO: Jeffrey M. Hull, Town Manager

FROM: Joseph Lobao, Business & Utility Manager
Michael Woods, Director of Public Works

SUBJECT: PFAS Result for October 2021

DATE: October 19, 2021

As a result of new state drinking water standards, the Town of Wilmington Water Division has been testing drinking water for a family of chemical compounds known as pre- and polyfluoroalkyl substance (PFAS). The most recent result indicates the presence of PFAS in a concentration above the new maximum contaminant level (MCL), and the Town is taking immediate action to address the PFAS increase.

On October 18, 2021, the Town received laboratory results that indicated a sample taken at the Sargent Water Treatment Plant on October 6, 2021, had (PFAS) at a level of 20.6 parts per trillion (ppt). Recently, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) issued a new regulation setting the drinking water standard for six PFAS compounds (referred to as PFAS6) at 20 nanograms per liter (ng/L), or 20 parts per trillion (ppt). The Commonwealth set its own standards because these compounds are not yet regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Currently, EPA has a nationwide advisory level of 70 ppt for two specific PFAS compounds (PFOA and PFOS).

While the sample result does not constitute a drinking water violation or nonconformance, the Town is required to give public notice once the 20ppt threshold is tripped. If we were to exceed the MCL 3 months consecutively, this would be a violation of the DEP regulations and result in a Notice of Noncompliance, with the DEP dictating steps the Town would need to take. Knowing our PFAS levels have increased, the DPW is preparing a plan of action to reduce the amount of PFAS in the drinking water as quickly as possible and has taken the following actions since receiving the sample result:

- Decreased the amount of water being distributed to the public from the Sargent WTP by shutting off 1 of the 3 wells sending water to this plant, the one with the highest PFAS levels. This will decrease the load on the carbon bed in the filters, which will reduce PFAS. We believe this step alone will reduce PFAS6 levels below the 20ppt drinking water standard.
- A new water sample was taken after shutting off 1 well. We expect laboratory results on October 25 and will place that information on our website.
- Increased the amount of water being taken from the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA), which has **no** PFAS6 detections. This will make up for the water loss from the deactivated well.
- Initiated the process of replacing the Granular Activated Carbon (GAC) at the Sargent Water Treatment Plant. GAC is a primary treatment method for PFAS removal. We have been successful with contracting with a GAC vendor and they are expected on-site October 26th. That means the Sargent WTP will go offline at that time and stay off for approximately 2 weeks while the GAC is replaced. Other maintenances will be performed during the down time. PFAS in the water distribution system is expected to be between non-detect and 5ppt with the one of the contributing sources offline.
- Created Town of Wilmington PFAS Information Page. (See link below)
- An informational flyer will be mailed to each address on our distribution system with the required DEP language, information in this memo and updates as they materialize.
- Continue our monthly PFAS6 sampling protocols at both WTPs.
- Engaged with MassDEP toward fulfilling all regulatory obligations.

PFAS are a family of thousands of manmade chemicals used for non-stick coatings, stain resistance in clothing and carpeting, and firefighting foams as well as many other uses. Manufacturing of certain PFAS was discontinued in the U.S. about 30 years ago, but they may still be used in imported products. PFAS are resilient and do not degrade easily in soil and water, they are known as “forever chemicals”. As a result, they are widely found in the environment and many consumer products where they migrate to the food supply and drinking water. In fact, most people already have concentrations of these chemicals in their blood as food and consumer products are additional points of exposure.

MassDEP states that “consuming water with PFAS6 above the drinking water standard does not mean that adverse effects will occur. The degree of risk depends on the level of the chemicals and the duration of exposure.” As a precautionary measure MassDEP recommends consumers in a sensitive subgroup (pregnant or nursing women, infants and people diagnosed by their health care provider to have a compromised immune system), not consume, drink, or cook with water when the level of PFAS6 is above 20 ppt. When in doubt or one has concerns about health, please speak with your health care provider to obtain the proper information for your situation. Numerous communities across the state and throughout the country have detected PFAS in their public water supplies at varying levels of concentration. Until recently testing had been required at the parts per billion concentration which led to non-detects in Wilmington’s treated water. Recently when testing was required at the parts per trillion concentration level PFAS was detected.

There are scientific studies that suggest potential links between exposure to certain PFAS in the environment and health effects. The studies have looked at the effects on the development of fetuses and infants, the thyroid, liver, kidneys, hormone levels and the immune system, as well as if a cancer risk exists for people exposed to levels **well above** the drinking water standard. Our understanding of the effects of PFAS on human health is still evolving. MassDEP and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control both note more research is needed and ongoing, and it is important to remember consuming water with high PFAS6 levels does not mean adverse effects will occur. While awaiting further scientific study, MassDEP has acted to set a conservative drinking water standard, and statewide public water suppliers are working in the best interest of consumers to lower PFAS6 levels where they are found to be at or above 20 ppt.

Consumers concerned about potential health effects of PFAS should consult a medical professional.

Water customers will soon receive in the mail an official notice from the Town as required by MassDEP. This official notice will provide more information, as stated above, about PFAS6 and additional resources.

For more information, visit the Wilmington Water Division website at <https://www.wilmingtonma.gov/water-sewer-division> or call 978-658-4711 and ask to speak with Joe Lobao, Utility Manager.