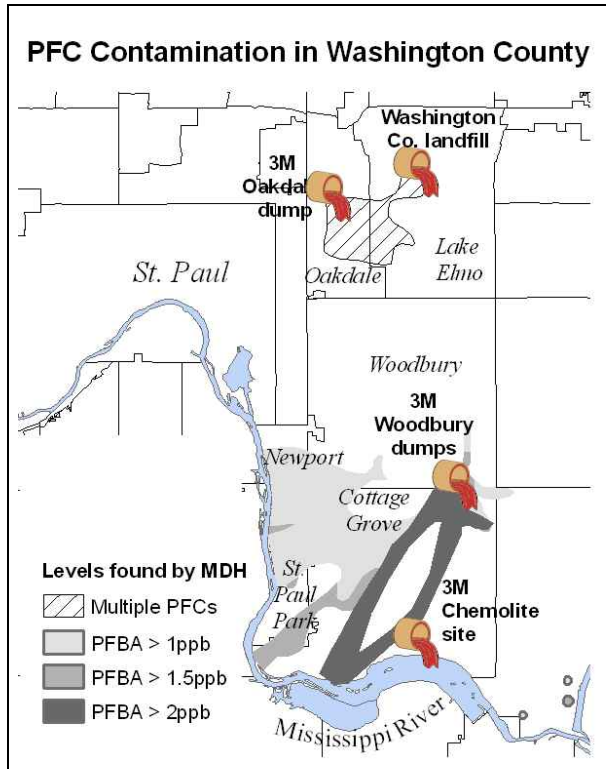


Protecting Our Water from PFC Contamination



Many questions about how harmful PFCs are remain unanswered. What is happening in the East Metro with PFCs shows that our government needs to take health risks from chemicals much more seriously. 3M followed the laws, but that was not enough to prevent a large-scale contamination.

What are Perfluorochemicals (PFCs)?

PFCs were made by the 3M Company in Cottage Grove and in several other communities around the world. These chemicals were used in household and industrial products such as stain repellents, lubricants, fire retardants, fire suppressants and pesticides. Two of the most common uses of PFCs found in the home are the products Teflon and Scotchguard. Three types of PFCs have contaminated East Metro water systems, as well as Lake Calhoun and other metro area lakes. They are perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS), perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorobutanoic acid (PFBA).¹

Why is there concern about PFCs?

While the level of water contamination is considered "low," there is concern about whether any level of exposure to PFCs is safe. A US EPA Science Advisory Board (SAB) reviewed animal study found health effects at even the lowest PFOA blood levels. The SAB also classified PFOA as a likely human carcinogen.² As a result of environmental and health concerns, 3M stopped production of Scotchguard in 2000 and ceased PFOA production at its Cottage Grove Plant.³ In high dose animal studies, PFOS and PFOA cause cancer, physical development delays, endocrine disruption and neonatal mortality.⁴ Much less is known about health effects from PFBA because it has not been studied extensively.

What is causing the contamination?

The suspected sources of contamination are 3M's production plant in Cottage Grove and landfills where 3M disposed of PFCs.⁵ However, the recent discovery of dangerously high levels of PFCs in bluegill fish in Lake Calhoun raises questions as to how the pollution became so widespread.

Who is affected by this problem?

Approximately 67,700 residents served by city water in Cottage Grove, St. Paul Park, Oakdale and private wells in Lake Elmo are affected by the pollution. Additionally, anyone who eats fish from the Chain of Lakes in Minneapolis or from the Mississippi River risks exposure to PFC contamination. A 3M chemical also has been detected in Woodbury, Newport, Hastings and South St. Paul. Three landfills in St. Paul, Inver Grove Heights and Rosemont also have high PFC concentrations. The effects on groundwater near these sites will be clarified through further testing.⁶

What should I do to avoid health risks?

Water filters containing Granular Activated Carbon (GAC) remove some PFCs. Many common water filters use GAC. You should be sure that these filters are properly installed and maintained. Bottled water has not been widely tested for PFCs and boiling water will not remove PFCs.⁷

What is being done about the contamination?

Due to recently passed state legislation, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) is setting drinking water standards or health risk limits (HRL) for PFOA, PFOS & PFBA. In early 2007, MDH cut in half the drinking water

standards for PFOA & PFOS from 1 ppb to .5 ppb and will rely on a 3M study to determine the standard for PFBA.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) reached an agreement with 3M that provides \$8 million to clean up PFCs in the Washington County Landfill, provides \$5 million to MPCA for research on PFCs in the environment, provides alternate drinking water where PFCs exceed state HRLs and removes PFC waste from three former disposal sites to store in a lined facility or incinerate.

Is Minnesota the only state with PFC contamination?

No, six other states -- New Jersey, Virginia, West Virginia, Ohio, Alabama and North Carolina -- have experienced PFC water contamination. In New Jersey, Virginia, West Virginia and North Carolina the contamination is from four DuPont plants that manufacture or continue to use PFOA. A 3M plant in Decatur is associated with the contamination in Alabama.

How have other contaminated communities responded?

Some community residents have filed class action lawsuits against DuPont and 3M. In Ohio and West Virginia, residents reached an out of court settlement that provides treatment systems for all affected public water supplies, installs carbon filtration systems on private wells and conducts community health evaluations to determine if there is a link between PFC exposure and disease. The data from the community health evaluations will be reviewed by an independent panel of experts. If the expert panel determines there is a link between PFC exposure and disease, a medical monitoring program will be established.

In New Jersey and Virginia, environmental groups and unions are working together to fight for safe drinking water, contamination clean up, medical monitoring and the quick phase out of PFOA production. In early 2007, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection set the drinking water guidance level for PFOA at .04 ppb, making it the lowest in the nation. This is more than ten times lower – thus more protective – than the current Minnesota standard.

What can I do about toxic chemical pollution?

Join Healthy Legacy! Healthy Legacy is a coalition of organizations promoting chemical policies that protect human health. Currently, the majority of chemicals in everyday products have not been tested for their health effects on humans. As a result, toxic chemicals are produced without regard to human and environmental impacts.

To learn more visit www.cleanwateraction.org/mn/pfc

¹ Minnesota Department of Health, Environmental Health Information, January 2007.

² Environmental Science and Technology Policy News, 4-11-07.

³ Minnesota Public Radio, *Toxic Traces* Series, 2005.

⁴ Environmental Health Perspectives Volume 115, Number 5, May 2007

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Minnesota Public Radio, April 4, 2007.

⁷ Minnesota Department of Health, Environmental Health Information, January 2007.

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