PFAS and Your Private Well

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Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are human-made chemicals used in a variety of consumer products and industries. PFAS make products water-repellent and resistant to stains and heat. They are known as "forever chemicals" because they do not break down easily in the environment.

These chemicals can accumulate in the body and exposure to certain PFAS has been linked to a variety of health risks. According to the National Ground Water Association, exposure to PFAS does not always mean that a person will have adverse health effects – the amount of exposure also matters. Most people have some measurable level of PFAS in their blood.

People can be exposed to PFAS through food, drinking water, dust, or consumer products

This fact sheet discusses PFAS in drinking water and treatment options. There are things you can do to protect your water supply from PFAS.

What level of PFAS in drinking water is safe?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) finalized drinking water standards for certain PFAS compounds in April 2024, including PFOA, PFOS, PFNA, PFHxS, and GenX (HFPO-DA).

The EPA established maximum contaminant levels (MCLs) for these five PFAS chemicals. MCLs are concentrations designed to protect public health while taking into consideration the ability to measure and remove a contaminant from drinking water.

MCLs for PFOA and PFOS are 4 parts per trillion (ppt), which is equivalent to 4 nanograms per liter (ng/L). One ppt is about the same as one drop of water in twenty Olympic-sized swimming pools.

MCLs for PFNA, PFHxS, and GenX are 10 ppt.

These MCLs apply to public water utilities. **Please note that the water quality of private wells is not regulated in New Mexico**. Well owners are responsible for well maintenance, protecting their water source, testing and, when applicable, treating their water.

How do PFAS get into drinking water?

PFAS can get into drinking water when products containing them are used or spilled onto the ground or into lakes and rivers. Researchers have found that PFAS in the air can also end up in lakes and rivers used for drinking water.

What can I do about PFAS in my drinking water?

There are several options to avoid consuming PFAS when they are present in drinking water:

- Use bottled water instead of well water for drinking and cooking.
- Purchase water from filtered filling stations found at many grocery stores.
- Treat your well water to remove PFAS.

Certain types of filters can decrease levels of PFAS in your drinking water. Granular activated carbon (GAC, also known as charcoal filters) and reverse osmosis (RO) are two technologies that can remove PFAS from water.

Keep in mind that filters will become contaminated during the process of removing PFAS from your water. The more you use your water filtration system, the more frequently the filters must be changed.

If you purchase a water filtration system, be sure to look for certifications from NSF, UL, and the Water Quality Association:

To be certified, filtration units are tested to confirm that they meet all claims of reducing contaminants in water. Remember to ask your service provider about details for regular maintenance of the treatment system.

Tips for reducing your exposure to PFAS in water

- Avoid using PFAS-containing water for drinking, making ice cubes, cooking foods where water is absorbed or consumed (like rice and soup), preparing baby formula, or similar uses.

- Touching water with PFAS is not harmful according to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. This area is still under research and guidance may change over time.

- Boiling or freezing water will not remove PFAS.

- Water that contains PFAS can be taken up by plants and concentrated in fruit and vegetable roots. Consider alternative water sources for gardening such as rainwater or filtered water.

Contact us for more information about PFAS and water quality:

PFAS Program
Drinking Water Bureau
New Mexico Environment Department
(505) 205-6964
DWB.PFAS@env.nm.gov
https://www.env.nm.gov/PFAS/