



BOROUGH OF ESSEX FELLS
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Dear Residents and Consumers,

You recently received a regulatory notice informing you that the Essex Fells Water Utility has detected levels of PFOA above the recently enacted New Jersey drinking water standard of 14 parts per trillion in three of the locations where water enters our system (i.e., before it is treated, not at the tap). As a regulated water utility, the Borough's water system was required to send the notice in the form in which it was delivered. I am writing now to offer some context regarding the information in the notice and to explain the steps we are taking to isolate, mitigate and reduce the level of PFOA in the affected locations to bring our drinking water into compliance with New Jersey's drinking water standard. This issue does not affect all of our wells, these circumstances exist in other water systems throughout the state and solutions are available.

First and foremost, the question at the top of everyone's minds is: can you continue to drink and use the water given the measured levels of PFOA? I can tell you unequivocally that I personally have no hesitation drinking or otherwise using the water, or allowing my family to do the same. The experts most familiar with our water system are of the same view. If we felt otherwise, you would know it. Similarly, if environmental regulators felt the level of PFOA or any other contaminant justified more drastic action, that notice would be conveyed to you in a much different fashion.

PFOA is prevalent throughout the environment and has been found in the blood serum of 98% of the U.S. population. While the precise human health effects from exposure to low levels of PFOA are unknown and will require additional study, the concern is generally with higher exposure levels and the potential effects of long-term or lifetime accumulations from multiple sources. That said, New Jersey has adopted a stringent new rule to begin reducing the amount of PFOA in the environment. As a result, we need to take steps to support that objective and we want you to be informed every step of the way. The current health advisories for PFOA in drinking water are focused on ingestion (drinking water or using it in food preparation), not skin contact or other exposures, such as washing dishes, doing laundry or watering your lawn.

Please note that the usual caveats regarding organic and inorganic substances in drinking water, of course, apply. Some people may be more vulnerable to contaminants in drinking water than the general population. In the case of PFOA specifically, if you are pregnant, nursing or providing an infant with formula that requires adding water, regulatory authorities recommend you seek advice regarding PFOA in drinking water from your health care providers.

I encourage you to carefully review the September 2021 regulatory notice and the fact sheets on PFOA published by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Copies of these materials are available at

[essexfellsboro.com/pages/pfoa](https://www.essexfellsboro.com/pages/pfoa). That page also includes answers to frequently asked questions, which I am confident you will find helpful. As more fully explained in those materials:

- Until this year, PFOA was an unregulated contaminant, meaning neither the EPA nor the NJDEP regulated it in drinking water. In 2016, the EPA issued a “lifetime health advisory“ for PFOA in drinking water, setting that advisory level at 70 parts per trillion, and that remains in effect. In other words, 70 ppt is the concentration of PFOA in drinking water at which the EPA concluded adverse health effects are not anticipated to occur over a lifetime. In 2019, the Essex Fells Water Utility began monitoring for PFOA and reporting those results to you in its Annual Drinking Water Quality Report. PFOA was detected in 2019 and 2020, but those results were well under the EPA’s health advisory level.
- Effective in 2021, the NJDEP began regulating PFOA in drinking water, and set its maximum contaminant level for PFOA at 14 parts per trillion. NJ is one of the first states to regulate PFOA, and its standard is 5 times more stringent than the EPA’s advisory standard. Based on samples collected through September 1, 2021, our water system was just above the new NJ standard for PFOA in three locations. Those test results showed PFOA levels of 15, 16 and 22 parts per trillion, respectively, meaning they exceeded the newly-established NJ regulatory limit by 1, 2 and 8 parts per trillion, respectively, and were well below the EPA’s advisory standard. To help you visualize what these “parts per trillion” measurements mean, one ppt is equivalent to a single drop of food coloring in 18 million gallons of water. 18 million of gallons of water is the total volume of water contained in over 27 Olympic-size swimming pools, combined. Stated differently, one ppt would be 1/27 of a drop of food coloring in a single Olympic-size swimming pool.
- The manufacture and use of PFOA has been significantly curtailed in the U.S in the last 15 years, but given its extensive use in consumer products and industrial processes since the 1940’s and its pervasiveness (i.e., it doesn’t break down), it can be found throughout the environment all over the world, including in many drinking water systems across New Jersey and the United States. PFOA appears more likely to find its way into water systems that use wells drilled into groundwater aquifers. Less affected are systems that rely on surface water, like rivers and reservoirs. Essex Fells draws its water from aquifers, which we believe overall is better than water drawn from NJ rivers, which have their own contaminant concerns. However, in this instance, that feature has likely contributed to the elevated PFOA samples.

We are committed to ensuring the quality of your water, and we are taking several steps, short- and long-term, to reduce the concentration of PFOA and bring the three affected sites within the NJ standard. To accomplish this:

- We will be expanding our existing treatment facilities to filter PFOA, using granulated activated carbon granules and/or ion exchange resins. Both technologies have been approved by the NJDEP for the effective removal of PFOA from water. Our experts have completed a feasibility study for this work, and are in the process of refining the design and confirming the timeline and cost. To accommodate the size of the filtration equipment, we need to construct or expand buildings at up to three sites. Our goal is to

expedite construction, but the timing is subject to NJDEP and local approvals, including approvals that will be required from other towns where we have facilities. Timing is also subject to the availability of specialized labor and materials, supplies of which are in high demand given the large number of water systems in New Jersey that need to build similar filtration systems in response to the new regulation.

- In the interim, we are confirming what steps we can take to most effectively isolate and reduce concentrations of PFOA before large new treatment facilities are constructed. We have temporarily stopped drawing water from two wells with higher concentrations of PFOA. We may close other wells or blend our water sources at different rates to bring the PFOA within the New Jersey limits. We have substantial capacity at wells that do not have excess levels of PFOA, which provides some flexibility. We are conducting additional testing throughout the system to gauge the impact of the initial steps we have taken and to inform our ongoing analysis of the optimal combination of adjustments. We may also utilize supplemental water sources. All of these interim measures are subject to additional discussions with our regulators and experts and careful consideration of the potential environmental impact of closing or reducing the amount we draw from particular wells, even temporarily.
- If you have installed, or are considering purchasing, a residential (or point of use) water filter that filters PFOA and PFOS, several of which are on the market, please see the “frequently asked questions” section of our website, where you will see some guidance on this topic.

As noted above, please review all of the materials available at essexfellsboro.com/pages/pfoa, including the NJDEP and EPA fact sheets and our answers to frequently asked questions. The site will be updated periodically as construction timelines are finalized and as new information becomes available.

The Essex Fells Water Utility has been providing water for over a hundred years. We work hard to protect our natural resources and deliver top quality water to every tap, and we are committed to ensuring that your drinking water continues to be the best water source for you and your family.

Sincerely,



Edward A. Davis

Mayor

Borough of Essex Fells