

Public Health Guidance

Advice for Reducing PFOA Exposures

Public health officials prepared this fact sheet to inform potentially sensitive people who may have water supplies containing the chemical perfluorinated octanoic acid (PFOA, also called C-8) about steps they can take to reduce their exposures.

You may obtain more information on-line at the following location:
<http://www.wvdhhr.org/oehs>

Click on Public Health Information

For questions about public water supplies in West Virginia:

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For questions about general chemical exposures to PFOA and health effects:

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Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry
(215) 814-3141
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For questions about the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's PFOA related activities:

Toni Krasnic
(202) 564-0984 or visit:
<http://www.epa.gov/oppt/pfoa/>

This informational document was developed in coordination with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

What's Happened So Far

PFOA is a manmade chemical that resists heat, water, oil, grease and stains. It is used during the process of making common household and industrial items such as nonstick pots and pans, flame-resistant and waterproof clothing, wire coatings and chemical-resistant tubing. PFOA can also be formed by the break-down of certain other highly fluorinated chemicals used in stain-resistant carpets, fabrics, and paints, and oil and grease-resistant coatings on fast-food containers and wrappers.

Completed and ongoing studies involving residents in the surrounding area of the DuPont Washington Works facility, located in Lubeck, Wood County, West Virginia have shown that the average level of PFOA in blood in this area is higher when compared to other U.S. residents.

Important steps are already complete to reduce community members' exposures to PFOA in this area, including:

- Public water supplies that exceed the current EPA site-area action threshold (0.4 ppb PFOA) have treatment systems operating.
- Private well owners whose water exceeds the threshold have been or will be provided an alternative solution.
- DuPont has significantly reduced its air and water emissions of PFOA from the Washington Works facility.
- Given their widespread use, it is extremely difficult to completely avoid exposure to perfluorochemicals (PFCs).

Advice for the Community

A great deal of scientific research is in progress on exposures to PFCs, including PFOA. However, there is still a great deal we do not know. For example, some studies suggest PFOA has slight effects on infant birth weight or on adult cholesterol levels; however it is not yet clear that those changes lead to identifiable health problems. Public health agencies do not have enough information at this time to determine what levels of exposure may cause actual health effects in people.

Based on science to date, potentially sensitive people for exposures to PFOA might include pregnant women, women of child-bearing age, infants and young children. Older people also may be sensitive to or process this chemical in their bodies differently than middle-aged people.

In the absence of definitive science, health agencies share the following precautionary advice with community members:

- Public Health officials recommend that mothers potentially exposed to PFOA continue to breastfeed. More than two decades of research have established that breast milk is perfectly suited to nourish infants and protect them from illness.
- To reduce exposures to infants, caregivers in the area should use premixed baby formula or reconstitute using alternative water sources not containing PFOA. Residents may contact their water supplier for more information about PFOA in their drinking water.
- Pregnant women, women of child-bearing age, children, and the elderly should reduce exposures to untreated water containing PFOA as much as is reasonably achievable.

