PFOA'S - WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW

Richard Winters | Circuit Rider I

As some of you may already know, the Village of Hoosick Falls has been found to have the PFOA contaminant in their public drinking water. I just wanted to share a portion of the information that I found on this contaminant with you and suggest that you do more research on this when you can. I say this because, I believe that this will soon be something that we will all have to check for when it is added to the required contaminant testing rules.

The information to follow was taken from:

New York Department of Health – December 2015 Long Fact Sheet – Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOA) In Drinking Water, Hoosick Falls, New York

EPA -Emerging Contaminants –Perfluorooctane Sulfonate (PFOS) and Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOA) - March 2014

A letter sent from the EPA Region 2 to the Village of Hoosick Falls Mayor on Nov. 25 – 2015

WHAT IS PFOA?

Perfluorooctanioc acid (PFOA, also known as C8 or Perfluorooctanoate) is a manufactured chemical that belongs to a group of fluorine-containing chemicals called perfluorinated chemicals (PFCs). These chemicals were, and are, used to make household and commercial products that resist heat and chemical reactions, and repel oil, stains, grease and water.

FACTS ABOUT PFOA:

PFOA was once widely used in nonstick cookware, in surface coatings for stain-resistant carpets and fabric, and in paper and cardboard food packaging (such as microwave popcorn bags and fast food containers). PFOA was also used in fire-fighting foam and in many products for the aerospace, automotive, building/construction, and electronics industries.

PFOA use in manufacturing of consumer products in the U.S. is slowly declining. Participating manufacturers of a PFOA stewardship program of the EPA were on track to reach the program's goal of phasing out these chemicals by the end of 2015.

PFOA gets into the environment from industrial facilities that make PFOA or use PFOA to make other products.

PFOA can remain in the environment, particularly in water, for many years. PFOA can move through soil and into groundwater, or be carried in air. PFOA has been found in soil, sediment, and water samples far away from where it was made or used. The highest levels of PFOA in the environment are typically found near industrial facilities that manufacture or use PFOA.

PFOA's have a half-life in humans of 2 to 9 years. (Because of this, your chances of getting to a level high enough to cause health effects if you are continuously exposed is greatly increased).

The U.S. EPA does not have an enforceable health-based drinking water standard (called a maximum contaminant level or MCL) for PFOA. **(YET)**

The New York State Department of Health (NYS DOH) does have an enforceable drinking water standard (MCL) of 50,000 parts per trillion (ppt) for any chemical (including PFOA) classified as an unspecified organic contaminant under Sub-part 5-1 of the State Sanitary Code. It only applies to chemicals, such as PFOA, that do not have a health-based standard derived from its toxicity data.

PFOA can be measured in blood. However, the test for PFOA in blood is not routinely done. These test results reflect total exposure to PFOA and cannot be used to identify specific sources of exposure or timing of past PFOA exposures.

If you have questions about potential health effects, please call 1-518-402-7800 or 1-800-458-1158, send an e-mail to btsa@health.ny.gov, or write New York State Department of Health, Bureau of Toxic Substance Assessment, Corning Tower, Room 1743, Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12237.

There is no conclusive evidence that PFOA causes cancer in humans.

ASSOCIATED HEALTH EFFECTS WITH PFOA EXPOSURE:

High cholesterol levels

Changes in thyroid hormones

Ulcerative colitis (autoimmune disease)

Pre-eclampsia (a complication of pregnancy that includes high blood pressure)

Kidney and testicular cancer

Studies showed effects on the liver, the immune

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system, and high serum uric acid levels, which may be associated with an increased risk of high blood pressure.

It is important to note that at this time no level of this contaminant is determined to cause any proven adverse effects on humans, but do trigger a health advisory. An exceedance of a health advisory indicates a potential threat to public health and is used as a signal to initiate actions to reduce exposure to the contaminant and to identify the sources of contamination. An exceedance also indicates the need for a further evaluation of the potential for health effects. A health advisory is not a "bright line" between drinking water levels that cause health effects and those that do not. It is a set water level at which estimated exposures are much lower than exposures known to cause effects in animals or assumed to cause effects in humans.

As stated in the beginning of this article, I have not even begun to scratch the surface of all the information concerning PFOA's and their future in the water treatment business. For the latest information on what Hoosick Falls, NY has already started to do about their huge problem with PFOA's, go to their website: www.villageofhoosickfalls.com/Water/default.html. Considering the potential for litigations to develop because of where this contaminant comes from, I would strongly suggest that you contact your legal advisors immediately if you test for and find any significant levels of PFOA's in your water system. I don't think this will be the last we hear about this subject, but hope this gets your attention on it.