

PFAS: A Guide for Ohio River Valley Communities

WHAT ARE PFAS?

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a group of man-made chemicals that do not occur naturally. There are around 10,000–12,000 types of PFAS, about 600 are used in the United States.

PFAS have been used in manufacturing since the 1950's. They are used for their non-stick and water-resistant properties. You can find them in fast food containers/wrappers, microwave popcorn bags, carpet and nonstick cookware.

PFAS are considered “forever chemicals” because they do not break down under natural environmental conditions. They have been found in 99% of people living in the United States. The main way we are exposed to them is through our drinking water and the food we eat.

AFFECTS ON HEALTH

In June of 2022, EPA released four drinking water health advisories for PFAS. These advisories set the level at which PFAS become dangerous to human health.

PFAS are known toxins and exposure affects the immune and cardiovascular systems; human development (e.g., decreased birth weight); and causes cancer [1].

The Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission (ORSNCO) recently studied PFAS throughout Ohio River. Multiple PFAS were detected at each site tested. In all, 28 types of PFAS were identified in Ohio River water [2].

This data is supported by a statewide report from the WVDEP that found high PFAS concentrations throughout the Ohio River Valley and the Eastern Panhandle.



Industry along the Ohio River.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Immediate removal of PFAS from drinking water is necessary to protect our citizens. Agencies must take swift action to control and reduce the use and release of these dangerous substances at their source.

It's going to take water utilities, agencies, policymakers, industries & consumers all working together to help make the public safer. The only truly safe solution is to eliminate further production of these toxins.



“Chemical companies line our river- there’s loyalty to those companies even if they’re damaging the environment. They’re an economic driver, and how do we go about making sure the economic drivers don’t leave, but do the right thing by their communities?” – Dawn, Marietta, OH

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

BE AN ADVOCATE

Your voice is the key to holding industry and policy-makers accountable for addressing PFAS in our water.

Scan the QR code, or go to wvivers.org/pfas to sign-up to receive updates, information, and actions you can take on PFAS in West Virginia.



WV Rivers Program Director Autumn Crowe takes a water sample out of the Ohio River to test for PFAS.



[1] Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022). Toxicological Profile for Perfluoroalkyls. <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/ToxProfiles/tp200-c1.pdf>

[2] Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission. (2022). Ambient PFAS Levels in the Ohio River. <https://www.orsanco.org/data/ambient-pfas-levels-in-the-ohio-river>

REDUCE EXPOSURE

- Activated charcoal or reverse osmosis water filters decrease PFAS levels in drinking water.
- Avoid using non-stick pans, instead use stainless steel or cast-iron.
- Avoid food packaging, or remove food packaging as soon as possible.
- Avoid stain, water-repellant and oil-repellant products.

If you have questions or concerns about products you use in your home, contact the Consumer Product Safety Commission at (800) 638-2772.


The Mountain Watershed Association and WV Rivers provide small grants to grassroots groups that advocate for change related environmental justice, shale gas and petrochemical issues.

Contact WV Rivers for more information.

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