UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

January 12, 2016

# Hoosick Falls, New York
# Drinking Water and Groundwater Contamination
# Frequently Asked Questions

## General Information

Testing by the New York State Department of Health and the Village of Hoosick Falls, New York, has revealed that groundwater and drinking water in the Village of Hoosick Falls is contaminated with perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA). PFOA belongs to a group of chemicals used to make household and commercial products that resist heat and chemical reactions and repel oil, stains, grease and water. PFOA was widely found in non-stick pots and pans, carpets and fire-fighting foam.

PFOA does not break down easily and therefore is very persistent in the environment. Its toxicity and persistence in the environment pose potential adverse effects to human health and the environment. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has been gathering information regarding the Hoosick Falls PFOA contamination in conjunction with the Village of Hoosick Falls, the New York State Department of Health and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

In 2009, the EPA established a provisional health advisory level of 400 parts per trillion (ppt) for short-term **(weeks to months)** exposure to PFOA. People should not drink water or use it for cooking if it contains more than 400 ppt of PFOA.

The EPA is developing long-term drinking water health advisories for PFOA based on the latest science. Once finalized, these health advisories will supersede the EPA's provisional health advisory issued in 2009. Short-term and long-term health advisories serve as guidance and are benchmarks for determining if concentrations of chemicals in tap water from public utilities are safe for public consumption.

## What do we know about contamination of Hoosick Falls' drinking water and groundwater?

Four out of five water samples collected from various locations within the public drinking water supply system in June 2015 had more than 600 ppt of PFOA. Additionally, groundwater sampling in 2015 at the Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics facility at 14 McCaffrey Street in Hoosick Falls found levels as high as 18,000 ppt. Some private wells in the area have also shown the presence of PFOA, though not at levels above 400 ppt.

## How long have I or my family been exposed?

The EPA does not know how long and at what levels PFOA has been in the public drinking water supply. If you are concerned about past exposures, you should discuss this with your private physician.



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## Should I drink the water from the Hoosick Falls public water supply or use it for cooking?

No, not at this time. Until a New York State Department of Health-approved treatment system is in place at the public water supply and confirmed to be consistently removing PFOA to acceptable levels, the public should not drink water from the Hoosick Falls public water supply or use it for cooking. Instead, the public should take advantage of bottled water available at the Tops Market in Hoosick Falls. Five gallons a day per household of free water is available to residents. EPA has recommended to the Village and Saint-Gobain that a larger volume of free water be made available to households where needed. For more details on this program, please see the Village's website: http://www.villageofhoosickfalls.com/.

## How can I get my private well tested?

If you have a private well, the New York State Department of Health will test it. To request testing of your well,

- contact Albert DeMarco at 518-402-7860;
- send an email to beei@health.ny.gov; or,
- write to Albert DeMarco at New York State Department of Health, Bureau of Environmental Exposure Investigation Corning Tower, Room 1717, Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12237.

If you arrange for your own testing of your private well, please notify the EPA by contacting Larisa Romanowski at 518-407-0400 or romanowski.larisa@epa.gov.

## Is it OK to shower or bathe with water from the Hoosick Falls public water supply?

There is a lack of studies evaluating the human health effects from inhalation and skin exposure to PFOA. Regarding inhalation, the EPA does not believe that routine showering or bathing would cause a significant exposure. A minimal amount of inhalable water droplets (aerosols) are formed during showering or bathing. PFOA also has a very low evaporation rate, which further minimizes inhalation exposure. Nonetheless, the use of bathroom ventilation systems and opening bathroom windows while showering or bathing can help remove the water vapor/aerosols that form during showering or bathing.

Similar to inhalation exposure, skin exposure from PFOA while showering or bathing is also not a significant exposure. Studies have shown very limited absorption of PFOA through the skin, and the movement of PFOA through the skin is extremely slow. However, as a precautionary measure and given the limited information on skin exposure, children or people with skin conditions (for example, rashes, cuts and abrasions) should avoid prolonged contact (such as long showers or long baths) with PFOA-contaminated water.

## What about teeth brushing?

Consistent with the EPA's recommendation not to use tap water from the Hoosick Falls public water supply for drinking or cooking, the EPA recommends that bottled water be used for brushing teeth.

## Can I use a humidifier?

Until a treatment system is in place at the public water supply and confirmed to be consistently removing PFOA to acceptable levels, the EPA recommends the use of bottled water for a humidifier.

## Can I do laundry and wash my dishes with water from the Hoosick Falls public water supply?

Yes. Neither doing laundry nor washing dishes with water from the Hoosick Falls public water supply pose a significant exposure to PFOA.



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## Would an in-home treatment system help filter the PFOA out of the water?

Carbon filtration and reverse osmosis are two technologies that can remove low levels of organic contaminants, such as PFOA, from water. While there are currently no commercially available point-of-use (POU) filters (filters attached to a tap) or whole house filters specifically certified by the National Sanitation Foundation to remove PFOA, it is expected that any activated carbon or reverse osmosis system will have the capability of reducing PFOA levels. The Minnesota Department of Health tested several POU water treatment devices and found many to be effective (visit http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/hazardous/topics/pfcs/wateranalysis.html for a summary). If a treatment unit is used, it is important to follow the manufacturer's guidelines for maintenance and operation. Moreover, testing of the treated water periodically would be necessary to ensure that the PFOA level remains below the EPA's health-based level.

## Has the soil been tested for PFOA and is the soil safe?

There has been a limited amount of soil testing for PFOA in Hoosick Falls. Additional soil sampling may occur in the future. If PFOA is found in the soil, there are practical actions that would minimize exposure to PFOA. For example, where bare patches of soil are known to have PFOA contamination, grass, mulch, compost, etc. are effective ways to prevent direct contact with the soil. Additionally, don't eat or smoke or engage in other hand-to-mouth activities while gardening.

## Is it OK to eat vegetables from my garden?

To EPA's knowledge, no gardens in Hoosick Falls have been tested for PFOA. In general, a number of studies have evaluated the absorption into plants of the whole class of perfluourinated compounds (of which PFOA is one). Absorption into plants depends on the size of the particular perfluourinated compound and its chemistry. Smaller compounds have more uptake. PFOA is a relatively large compound and has lower uptake. Absorption also differs by the type of produce. Root vegetables that grow in the ground and leafy green vegetables (for example, lettuce) generally have greater absorption of chemicals, including PFOA. Root and leafy vegetables also tend to adhere soil to the surface of the produce. If PFOA is found in soil, thoroughly washing root and leafy green vegetables with bottled water will further reduce the minimal exposure to PFOA from growing produce in soil contaminated with PFOA and/or watering produce gardens with PFOA contaminated water. One could also peel root vegetables prior to consumption.

## Can PFOA coat the inside of my home's pipes?

Based on the high solubility of PFOA (ability of the chemical to dissolve) in water relative to the concentration found in Hoosick Falls drinking water, it would be unlikely for PFOA to coat the inside of pipes.

## Can PFOA be removed from the public water supply?

Treatment technologies exist that can remove PFOA from public water supplies. One such technology is granular activated carbon (GAC) filtration. Another is called reverse osmosis. The Village of Hoosick Falls and Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics are negotiating an agreement under which Saint-Gobain would pay for the installation of GAC systems at the Village's water treatment plant. The systems need to be designed carefully to ensure that they will successfully treat the water to remove PFOA to acceptable levels. The New York State Department of Health will be working closely with the Village of Hoosick Falls as the treatment systems are designed with the goal of removing PFOA to the minimum reporting limit that can be reliably achieved by the

analytical laboratory when using EPA Method 537. Until the treatment systems are in place and confirmed to be consistently removing PFOA to acceptable levels, the public should not use the Hoosick Falls public water supply for drinking or cooking.

## What is being done to address the groundwater contamination?

The EPA has begun discussions regarding steps that need to be taken to:

a. identify, control and clean up the source or sources of the PFOA contamination of the groundwater;
b. determine the full extent of the PFOA contamination; and
c. achieve a permanent cleanup remedy for the groundwater contamination and any other possible contamination.

## How would these actions be paid for?

In this case, the EPA expects one or more private parties liable for the pollution to pay for addressing the problems.

## How can I get more information?

The EPA has a web page with information about the Hoosick Falls drinking water contamination. The EPA will update this site as more information becomes available. Visit: http://www.epa.gov/aboutepa/hoosick-falls-ny-water-contamination.
In addition, the Village of Hoosick Falls has information on its website at: http://www.villageofhoosickfalls.com.

## How do I contact the EPA?

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