

# PFAS FREE DRINKING WATER

## A Guide to Talking with Local Officials about PFAS Testing

### What are PFAS?

PFAS (pronounced “PEA-FASS”) are toxic chemicals that have been found in the drinking water of a growing number of Wisconsin communities. They have been used in a wide variety of consumer products, including firefighting foam, nonstick cookware, water-repellant clothing, stain resistant carpets, cleaning products, cosmetics and more.

### Are PFAS a threat to human health?

Yes. Even at extremely low levels, exposure to PFAS has been linked to an increased risk of cancer and other serious health problems, such as reproductive and developmental problems, thyroid hormone disruption, high cholesterol, ulcerative colitis, reproductive and developmental problems, negative impacts to the immune system, and more.

### Do Wisconsin water utilities test for PFAS?

Given the serious risks to public health, all municipalities should conduct comprehensive PFAS testing using the most up-to-date methods. However, there is currently no statewide requirement to test for PFAS, which means that many municipalities haven’t done so. Some communities—including Milwaukee, Madison, Marinette, Peshtigo, Rhineland, La Crosse, Eau Claire and Wausau—have tested for PFAS, but most have not. Until they do, an unknown number of Wisconsin families will continue to drink contaminated water. Tell your local officials **it's time to test for PFAS**.

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*Municipal water utilities have an important role to play in preventing exposure to toxic PFAS chemicals. Because PFAS are odorless and tasteless, testing a water sample is the only way to know if they are present.*

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# YOUR VOICE MATTERS

Public engagement is critical for ensuring that your community's drinking water is free from toxic PFAS chemicals.

Despite the serious health risks associated with PFAS exposure, many local officials in Wisconsin have been reluctant to undertake comprehensive testing of municipal water supplies.

Your input will help ensure that elected officials and water utility operators in your community understand the important role they play in protecting public health.

## WHAT YOU MIGHT HEAR FROM RELUCTANT PUBLIC OFFICIALS

Some local officials may try to avoid responsibility or offer justifications for inaction. Be prepared to engage with them and to provide accurate and compelling information to help spur them to action.

### "The State of Wisconsin doesn't require us to test."

While Wisconsin has begun to take steps to regulate PFAS in drinking water, it will likely be months or even years before the state requires all municipal water utilities to test. In the meantime, there is nothing that prevents municipalities from voluntarily testing. DNR has established a voluntary sampling program, and federal funds are available to help pay for the cost of testing and remediation. Given the known health risks associated with PFAS exposure, local municipalities should begin testing immediately to protect their constituents.

### "The federal government will require us to test, but not until 2023."

It's true that starting in 2023, EPA is proposing to require water utilities serving more than 3,300 people to test for certain PFAS. However, those results won't be available for years. It's important to start testing immediately so that if PFAS levels exceed the Wisconsin Department of Health Services' advisory level of 20 parts per trillion (ppt), local officials and their constituents have the information they need to take appropriate action.

### "We tested in the past and found no problems."

Between 2013 and 2015, the EPA required some utilities in Wisconsin to test for PFAS under the **Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule (UCMR3)**. This was a step in the right direction, but all water utilities should conduct comprehensive PFAS testing again, regardless of whether they were subject to EPA-mandated testing in the past. Here's why:

- Utilities that were required to test under UCMR3 were primarily those serving more than 10,000 people.
- Testing was limited to only six of the thousands of PFAS chemicals that exist.
- Methods for detecting PFAS in water have greatly improved since that time.

The EPA uses the Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule (UCMR) to collect data every five years for contaminants that are suspected to be present in drinking water and do not have health-based standards set under the Safe Drinking Water Act. Ask local officials if your municipality's water was tested under UCMR3. If so, tell them you would like to see the results. You can also search for test results [here](#).

### "PFAS testing is too expensive."

In February 2022, Governor Evers announced the availability of \$600,000 in funding from the EPA to help local communities test their drinking water. If a community finds their drinking water supply is impacted by PFAS, the DNR and Department of Health Services will assist community leaders to leverage all resources available to protect the health of residents and address the contamination. Ask your local officials to contact the DNR about participating in [the DNR's voluntary sampling program](#).

### "We can't test until the EPA and the DNR establish enforceable water quality standards."

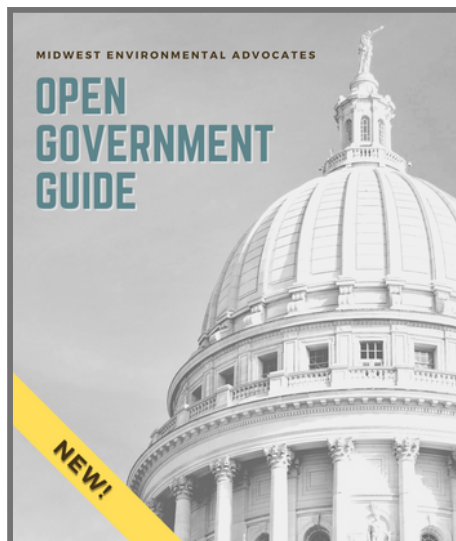
Given the known risks to public health, we can't afford to wait. Based on the most recent scientific information available, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services has proposed a combined standard of 20 parts per trillion for PFOA, PFOS, FOSA, NtFOSA, NtFOSAA, and NtFOSE. The 20 ppt standard provides a concrete guideline to protect the health of Wisconsin residents.

### "It'll be too expensive to remediate PFAS contamination if we discover we have a problem."

Under the infrastructure bill signed by President Biden in November, federal funds will soon be available to help Wisconsin communities with the cost of PFAS remediation. Wisconsin is set to receive nearly \$143 million in funding for state revolving fund loan programs. These programs provide grants and below-market-rate loans to fund water infrastructure improvements to protect public health and the environment. Waiting to find out if your community's water contains elevated levels of PFAS could mean losing out on the opportunity to take advantage of significant federal resources.

### "There's no point in testing because PFAS are everywhere in the environment."

The widespread nature of PFAS contamination does not mean that water utilities and local officials don't have a responsibility to take steps to protect their constituents. Scientists tell us that contaminated drinking water is the most common PFAS exposure pathway. Avoiding contaminated water can go a long way toward reducing unnecessary exposure. That's why it's so important to know if your water contains elevated levels of PFAS.



## Your Right to Know

You deserve full transparency about what's in your drinking water. If you have reason to believe local officials are withholding information, you may need to submit a public records request to obtain the information you're asking for. Midwest Environmental Advocates' [\*\*Open Government Guide\*\*](#) can help. Learn more [\*\*here\*\*](#).

## TIPS FOR MAKING YOUR VOICE HEARD

### Identify the right decision makers.

Start by contacting elected officials in the town, village or city where you live. You may find that elected officials will redirect you to staff at the water utility. This is not uncommon, especially when elected officials feel like they don't know enough about the issue. Talking with water utility staff can be helpful, but don't give up on talking with your elected officials. They have the power to order your water utility to test.

### Educate, educate, educate!

Provide decision makers with resources to help them better understand the issue.

### Don't be intimidated.

Public officials want to hear from you. They work on many different issues and may not know as much about a specific issue as you do.

### Stay on topic.

Your message will be clearer if you avoid political statements and stay focused on the issue at hand.

### State your position clearly and concisely.

Make sure decision makers understand what you want them to do.

### Be kind and courteous.

Be calm and respectful even if you disagree with someone else's point of view.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### STATE OF WISCONSIN

Wisconsin PFAS Action Plan

WI Department of Natural Resources PFAS Page

WI Department of Health Services PFAS Page

### US ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

EPA PFAS Action Plan

EPA - PFAS Page

EPA PFOA & PFOS Health Advisory

### COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

#PFASFree Wisconsin

Citizens for Safe Water Around Badger

Midwest Environmental Advocates

S.O.H2O



The goal of **#PFASfree Wisconsin** is to raise awareness of the danger that PFAS chemicals pose to public health and to build a broad base of support for testing all public drinking water systems in Wisconsin for the presence of PFAS. Learn more about the campaign at [pfasfree.org](https://pfasfree.org)