

Wisconsin Municipal Water Utilities Getting Ready for New PFAS Drinking Water Regulations

Wisconsin water utilities' number one priority is protecting public health. We work diligently to provide safe, high-quality drinking water that meets all federal and state standards.

Wisconsin will soon adopt new drinking water standards for two chemicals that are part of a large family of man-made chemicals referred to as Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS). We want to tell you about this new regulation and what we will be doing to implement it.

About PFAS

PFAS are a large family of more than 5,000 man-made chemicals that have been used in industry and consumer products since the 1940s because of their useful properties. There are thousands of different PFAS, some of which have been more widely used and studied than others.

Perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) are two of the most widely used and studied chemicals in the PFAS group. According to EPA, PFOA and PFOS have been replaced in the United States with other PFAS in recent years.

A major concern with PFAS chemicals is that they break down very slowly and as a result they can build up in people, animals, and the environment over time. Because of their widespread use and their persistence in the environment, many PFAS are found in the blood of people and animals all over the world and are present at low levels in a variety of food products and in the environment. PFAS are found in water, air, fish, and soil at locations across the nation and the globe.

New Wisconsin Drinking Water Standards for PFOA and PFOS

Later this year, Wisconsin will begin regulating PFOA and PFOS in drinking water. Wisconsin's new drinking water standard for PFOA and PFOS combined will be 70 parts per trillion.

Over the next year, all Wisconsin municipal water utilities will test their drinking water for PFOA and PFOS based on the testing schedule established by the DNR. If a water sample exceeds 70 parts per trillion, the utility will take the steps needed to meet the new state standard. That may mean abandoning or not using a well or constructing a system to treat the drinking water.

Customers will be notified if their water utility's PFAS sampling results exceed the state standards or the lower health advisory levels that have been recommended by

Wisconsin's Department of Health Services (DHS). In addition, all sample results will be included in your utility's consumer confidence report.

EPA's Revised Health Advisory Levels for PFOA and PFOS

EPA has not yet adopted federal drinking water standards for PFOA or PFOS but has stated that it intends to propose a federal standard for them this fall.

In the meantime, in June 2022, EPA issued a revised health advisory level of 0.004 parts per trillion for PFOA and 0.02 parts per trillion for PFOS. These miniscule levels are below EPA's ability to detect at this time so any detect of PFOA or PFOS in drinking water would exceed these levels.

These health advisory levels are not enforceable standards but rather provide information on the levels below which no health impacts on even sensitive individuals would occur. These health advisory levels will remain in place until federal standards are finalized.

For More Information

Going forward, research on how best to address PFAS found in drinking water will be critical. Water utilities need guidance on established and emerging treatment options and practical and feasible strategies to address PFAS found in drinking water. Consumers need more guidance on the best ways to limit their exposure to PFAS.

For more information on PFAS and what you can do, visit the websites of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, or the Wisconsin Department of Health Services.