

Response to Boston Globe Article on PFAS in Local Water Supplies
Harvard Board of Health
March 7, 2019

Executive Summary:

The Board of Health is aware of the 3/6/19 Boston Globe article about PFAS in Ayer's water supply. **None of the wells tested in Harvard exceeded Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection's (MassDEP) June 2018 advisory levels for PFAS above 70 parts per trillion in water.**

The Department of Public Works Director reports that the Harvard Municipal Water System ~~has not been tested, as it is not required, but the Harvard Water Department will be testing both Town Wells at its earliest convenience. Per the Department of Public Works Director, it is highly unlikely that there are PFAS in the water due to its distance from Devens, but water testing should confirm this.~~ was tested for PFO and PFA contaminants on March 13, 2019, and none were detected.

Background:

The U.S. Army and MassDEP have been monitoring water on the former Fort Devens and in surrounding communities for Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS), which are found in firefighting foams and other products.

Contractors on behalf of the U.S. Army began monitoring water at Devens and in the Town of Ayer for PFAS beginning in 2016. In late 2018, the U.S. Army sampled water at additional locations including along Ayer Road, Lancaster County Road and Old Mill Road in Harvard. None of the wells tested in Harvard exceeded MassDEP's guidelines for PFAS.

MassDEP recommends that residents in sensitive subgroups, including pregnant women, nursing mothers, infants, not consume water when the levels are above 70 parts per trillion in water.

Should you test your water?

If you have your own well, and live in the Ayer Road area under investigation (i.e., Ayer Road near the Ayer town line, north of Route 2), you could consider testing your water for PFAS. There is currently no indication that PFAS are present in any other area in Harvard.

The Board of Health recommends that all home owners with private wells test their well water (pre-filtration) at least every five years, but always test it if you notice a change in taste, smell, or appearance. Current local regulations also require that all private wells have water quality testing prior to property sales.

Bowers Brook Apartments, Foxglove Apartments, and Harvard Green Condominiums, are Public Water Supplies that were tested by U.S. Army contractors and did not exceed MassDEP's June 2018 guidelines for PFAS (links to MassDEP under Resources, below).

More about PFAS:

PFAS are fluorinated organic chemicals. Two PFAS chemicals, perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS) have been the most extensively produced and studied of these chemicals. PFAS are contained in firefighting foams, which have been used in training exercises and to extinguish oil and gas fires at a variety of locations including airfields. PFAS are also used in a number of industrial processes and have been used to make carpets, clothing, fabrics for furniture, paper packaging for food and other materials (e.g., cookware) that are resistant to water, grease or stains. Because these chemicals have been used in many consumer products, most people have been exposed to them.

While consumer products and food are the largest source of exposure to these chemicals for most people, drinking water can be an additional source of exposure in communities where these chemicals have contaminated water supplies. Such contamination is typically localized and associated with a specific facility, for example, an airfield at which they were used for firefighting or a facility where these chemicals were produced or used.

Resources:

MassDEP Fact Sheet–PFAS in Drinking Water: Questions and Answers for Consumers
www.mass.gov/files/documents/2018/06/11/PFAS-in-dw-fs_0.pdf

EPA's Drinking Water Health Advisories
<https://www.epa.gov/ground-water-and-drinking-water/drinking-water-health-advisories-pfoa-and-pfos>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Public Health Statement for PFOS and PFOA
<https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/PFAS/index.html>

The CDC on Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) and your health
<https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/PFAS/health-effects.html>

NSF certified filters to reduce PFOA and PFOS concentrations in drinking water
<http://www.nsf.org/newsroom/nsf-international-certifies-first-water-filters-pfoa>

MassDEP's Field Sampling Guidelines for PFAS
<https://www.mass.gov/doc/field-sampling-guide-for-PFAS/download>

Former Fort Devens Environmental Cleanup
<https://ftdevens.org/public/framework/bannerhtml.aspx>

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Chair, Board of Health

Revisions:

3/10/19: Date added. Signature added. CDC health URL corrected.

3/13/19: Clarification to Paragraph 6 & 8. Added MassDEP resource.

3/27/19: Revisions to Paragraph 2 to include updated information.