



Removing PFAS Starts at The Source

Stories about PFAS have multiplied as we discover more about these “forever chemicals.” They’ve been in our lives since the 1940s – used in clothing, carpets, couches, cookware, cosmetics, and more – but we had no idea until this century that prolonged exposure could be harmful to our health.

At least 80 percent of PFAS in humans comes from consumer goods. But the chemicals are also in our water supplies. That’s because PFAS from products eventually get into the environment and for decades polluters were able to dump them into waterways, thanks to regulatory loopholes.

The Water Environment Federation represents more than 30,000 water professionals who work every day to protect public health and the environment. We share concerns about PFAS. But water utilities don’t produce or use PFAS and now have to clean up after polluters.

However, addressing PFAS isn’t easy. There is a lack of information provided by manufacturers, the chemicals are found everywhere, and they are difficult and costly to remove. But water utilities are voluntarily monitoring for PFAS, improving treatment technologies, and conducting research to help with decision making.

When found at concerning levels, utilities require financial assistance to remove PFAS because treatment is extremely expensive. If polluters aren’t held to account – and they rarely are – the cleanup cost is passed to water customers, some of whom can least afford bigger bills. Make no mistake, removing PFAS is yet another environmental justice issue.

But water treatment is a fix after a failure. What we really need is an intensified focus on stopping sources of PFAS contamination. After all, if your bathtub was overflowing, you wouldn’t start bailing it out with a bucket. You would turn off the tap. The same approach is needed with PFAS.

PFAS must be replaced in manufacturing processes with safer alternatives. Non-essential uses should end. Industrial discharges must be stopped. Cleanup of highly contaminated sites should be prioritized.

We shouldn’t force water utilities and their customers to solve and pay for a problem created by polluters. The best path forward is to stop PFAS at the source.

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