



Department of  
Environmental  
Conservation

Department  
of Health

Agriculture  
and Markets

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:  
PFOA IN SOILS, WATER, AND IMPACT ON AGRICULTURE**

August 2016

**Q. What is PFOA?**

Perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) belongs to a group of manufactured chemicals called perfluorinated chemicals (PFCs). PFCs were once widely used to make household and commercial products that resist heat and repel oil, stains, grease, and water. Such products include nonstick cookware, surface coatings for stain-resistant carpets and fabric, and paper and cardboard food packaging. Manufacturers began phasing out the use of PFOA in 2006.

**Q. Can PFOA be present in soils?**

Yes, PFOA, as well as a related chemical perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS), can enter soils through discharges to the environment, including spills and possibly air deposition. Based on sampling conducted in Hoosick Falls and Petersburg by New York State, low levels of PFOA and PFOS have been detected in some samples from yards, gardens, and vacant lots.

**Q. How can I find out if PFOA is in my water or soil?**

Tests can detect the level of PFOA or PFOS in your home water source, in your farm water source, or in your soil. If you live in an area where you believe there may be possible PFOA or PFOS exposure, you can find out how to get your drinking water tested by calling the New York State Department of Health at 518-402-7860. If you live near a suspected illegal dumping site, please contact the Department of Environmental Conservation at 518-402-8044.

**Q. What do I do if a test shows PFOA in my water?**

If drinking water contains PFOA and PFOS at individual or combined concentrations greater than 70 parts per trillion, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) health advisory level, the EPA recommends that consumers consider options to reduce exposure, including the use of an alternative drinking water source. Properly maintained granular activated carbon filters effectively remove PFOA, PFOS, and other PFCs from water. If you would like information on installing a carbon filter for either residential or agricultural water, please contact the Department of Environmental Conservation at 518-402-8044. For more information, please visit:

[http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/investigations/hoosick/docs/hoosick\\_pou\\_final.pdf](http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/investigations/hoosick/docs/hoosick_pou_final.pdf)



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**Q. Can I garden or engage in other activities that involve contact with soil on my property?**

Yes. Based on sampling to date, the amount of PFOA and/or PFOS exposure that a gardener or someone, including children, contacting soil might have from accidentally ingesting or inhaling soil dust would be insignificant. Any possible skin absorption would also be insignificant. However, it is always a good idea to wash hands after contact with soil from any location and to follow healthy gardening practices. For more information about these practices, please visit: <http://www.health.ny.gov/publications/1301/>

**Q. I have a backyard garden. Can I eat what I've grown in soil on my property?**

Yes. While PFOA and PFOS may be detected in soil samples, research shows that the amount of these chemicals taken up by plants is limited. Based on sampling to date, you may eat fruits and vegetables grown in soil with PFOA and PFOS unless you live near a site where illegal disposal of PFOA or PFOS may have occurred. If you live near a suspected illegal dumping site, please contact the Department of Environmental Conservation at 518-402-8044.

**Q. Is it safe to consume dairy products from cows that may have been exposed to PFOA?**

Yes. Research shows that dairy cows are much more efficient than humans at eliminating PFOA from their bodies through urine and they only excrete a small amount of PFOA in their milk. Furthermore, research on cows fed water with high levels of PFOA—far higher than levels found in Hoosick Falls and Petersburg—found zero to minimal levels of PFOA in their milk.

**Q. I raise livestock for meat. What do I need to know?**

Research shows that animals, such as cattle, pigs, and sheep are much more efficient than humans at eliminating PFOA from their bodies. Nevertheless, the Department of Agriculture and Markets recommends that if the water source for livestock is above the EPA health advisory level, livestock should be given water below the EPA health advisory level prior to slaughter. Producers who believe PFOA may be in their water can find out how to get a water test by contacting the NYS Department of Health at 518-402-7860.

**Q. I raise chicken for eggs and meat. What do I need to know?**

The Department of Agriculture and Markets recommends that if the water source for your chickens is above the EPA health advisory level, your chickens should be given water below the EPA health advisory level prior to slaughter and egg consumption. Producers who believe PFOA may be in their water can find out how to get a water test by contacting the NYS Department of Health at 518-402-7860.



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**Q. Should I be concerned about local maple syrup?**

We have no evidence, either here in New York or in neighboring Vermont, that maple syrup contains PFOA at levels that are a concern for health. The NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets tested sap collected directly from maple trees from locations in Hoosick Falls and Petersburg. The results from the samples ranged from undetectable to very low trace levels. If a maple producer would like to find out how to get a water test, please contact the Department of Health at 518-402-7860.

**Q. If I have questions who should I call?**

If you have questions about health effects from PFOA or PFOS in soils, or would like to find out how to get a water test, please contact the Department of Health at 518-402-7800.

If you have questions about PFOA and agricultural products, contact the Department of Agriculture and Markets at 518-457-2771.

If you have questions about soil sampling, illegal dumping, or water filtration, contact the Department of Environmental Conservation at 518-402-8044.