Orange Water and Sewer Authority
Our community's trusted partner for clean water and environmental protection

Clear Waters: Navigating your PFAS Questions and Concerns

April 11, 2025

Thank you for your interest in how OWASA is addressing PFAS in our community's water. Our goal is to connect with our community and become partners with you in understanding and addressing PFAS in our drinking water, wastewater, and biosolids. With this quarterly newsletter, we hope to keep you well-informed of our research and design of new treatment facilities, as well as regulations that affect how we manage your drinking water and wastewater treatment.

Eagle Eye on PFAS: First Quarter 2025 Monitoring Results

Our drinking water monitoring results for the first quarter of 2025 are now available on our online information hub, PFAS & Your Water. Our most recent monitoring data, completed during the first quarter of 2025, detected PFOA at 3.5 ppt and PFOS at 3.8 ppt in our finished drinking water. PFHxS and PFBS were not detected during first quarter 2025 sampling but have been detected in the past. HFPO-DA (Gen-X) and PFNA have never been detected in our treated drinking water. Quarter 1 and average values detected of these six PFAS compounds in drinking water since 2018 are:

PFAS Compound	Quarter 1 2025	Average Values Detected 2018-2024	EPA Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCL)
PFOA	3.5	11.1 ppt	4 ppt
PFOS	3.8	5.7 ppt	4 ppt
PFHxS	Non-detect	2.3 ppt	10 ppt and as part of hazard index (1)
PFNA	Non-detect	Non-detect	10 ppt and as part of hazard index (1)
PFBS	Non-detect	2.1 ppt	and as part of hazard index (1)
HFPO-DA (Gen-X)	Non-detect	Non-detect	10 ppt and as part of hazard index (1)

Quarter 1 2025 PFAS Monitoring Data- Finished Drinking Water

Timeline Shift on Major Construction Projects at Water Treatment Plant

OWASA's Jones Ferry Road Water Treatment Plant has two major construction projects on the horizon: a new Clearwell, and a new drinking water treatment facility to remove

PFAS. The Clearwell replacement project is necessary to replace aging infrastructure, which has reached the end of its useful life and serves a critical function in the water purification process to ensure the community is reliably receiving safe drinking water. The PFAS Treatment project includes the design and construction of a Granular Activated Carbon (GAC) treatment facility, our community's best long-term, sustainable solution to meet the EPA's new regulations and OWASA's goals for reducing PFAS in drinking water.

Both projects are very important, but multiple factors have encouraged us to consider staggering the construction of these two projects, starting with the time-sensitive Clearwell replacement project. OWASA feels confident delaying the construction of the PFAS treatment facility because our optimized use of Powdered Activated Carbon (PAC) is allowing us to meet the EPA's future standards for PFAS in drinking water in the near term.

Staggering the projects will help OWASA to better manage the complexity of constructing both major projects concurrently on the Jones Ferry Road campus, as well as manage the significant costs of these two projects.

At their March 13 meeting, OWASA's Board of Directors considered the difficult decision to delay the construction of the PFAS treatment project until the Clearwell project is complete.

Pilot Project To Wrap Up



After nearly a full year of study, OWASA's PFAS drinking water treatment pilot project will soon be complete. The pilot project helped us to compare the effectiveness and cost of Granulated Activated Carbon (GAC) to Ion Exchange (IX).

The pilot project was in commission through a wide range of seasonal conditions over much of the last year and provided a clear picture of how each tested technology and combination of technologies performs under different scenarios for water quality in our area.

Testing both technologies showed that GAC is similarly effective at removing PFAS from our community's water as IX. GAC is more sustainable, as the material can be reused.

Now that we have gained the knowledge we need from the pilot project, we will continue to focus our work on optimizing Powdered Activated Carbon (PAC) for PFAS removal under various water quality conditions.

Seeking Funding Support for PFAS Treatment

The PFAS drinking water treatment project is one of the largest capital projects in OWASA's history. As a special unit of government, supported only by the rates and fees we charge for our services, paying for PFAS clean-up in our traditional manner puts an overwhelming burden on our community. To help relieve this burden, OWASA is actively seeking financial support from the state government, the federal government, and private companies responsible for making PFAS.

To advance our efforts to get funding from the state and federal government, OWASA has partnered with Biser Strategies, LCC. In addition to appealing for direct funding to OWASA, Biser Strategies is also working to launch a coalition of utilities from across

the state to appeal for comprehensive support.

Like thousands of communities across the country, OWASA and the Chapel Hill-Carrboro community are facing significant expenses to remove PFAS from drinking water and meet Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) that will go into effect in 2029.

Biser Strategies, bringing decades of experience in representing environmental interests to protect natural resources, is already hard at work engaging our state and federal elected officials to educate them on the financial burden PFAS contamination is having on communities across North Carolina.

It is our hope that, in launching a PFAS Funding Coalition, we can tell a compelling and complete story about the cost to communities across North Carolina in dealing with PFAS pollution and the measures needed to protect public health.



Testing Fish in Cane Creek Reservoir for PFAS



PFAS science is rapidly evolving, including how PFAS in waterways may become concentrated in fish. This could be a concern to our community since OWASA's Cane Creek Reservoir, in addition to serving as our largest drinking water source, is one of our community's most valued recreation resources. Fish caught there are often kept and consumed.

In 2023, the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) recommended limiting consumption of certain fish from the middle and lower

Cape Fear River when PFOS was found in fish tested in that area. That same year, results were released from a study showing all fish tested from nearby popular fishing spot Jordan Lake were found to have unsafe PFAS levels for human consumption. DHHS states that these advisories are issued to allow consumers to weigh the benefits of fish consumption for nutrition with the risks of health effects from PFAS exposure. While some fish should be eaten only in limited quantities, specific fish, DHHS recommended, should not be eaten at all due to the levels of PFAS found in them.

Due to this emerging information, OWASA began distributing educational brochures for Cane Creek visitors during our 2024 recreation season to make sure our fishers were informed of the possibility of PFAS in fish caught there. We immediately began working with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission to plan and execute testing of fish species in Cane Creek Reservoir for PFAS.

In February, we hit the waters with fish collection experts from N.C. Wildlife Resource Commission to start retrieving sample fish to be tested for PFAS concentrations. After testing is complete, we will share those results on our website at owasa.org/pfas-and-your-water/.

EPA Releases Draft Risk Assessment on the Land Application of Biosolids Containing PFOA and PFOS


Draft Sewage Sludge Risk Assessment for Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOA) and Perfluorooctane Sulfonic Acid (PFOS)

A Notice by the Environmental Protection Agency on 01/15/2025

Comments on this document are being accepted at Regulations.gov.

44 comments received. View posted comments

PUBLISHED CONTENT - DOCUMENT DETAILS

Agency: Environmental Protection Agency
Agency/Docket Numbers: EPA-HQ-OW-2024-0504FRL 12451-01-OW
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On January 14, the EPA released a draft risk assessment of the land application of biosolids containing PFOA (Perfluorooctanoic Acid) and PFOS (Perfluorooctane Sulfonic Acid). PFOA and PFOS are two common types of PFAS. The EPA conducts risk assessments on various chemicals that affect human health and the environment. They are published to provide a scientific basis for action, including regulation, to protect public health and the environment. A draft risk assessment invites questions and comments on the EPA's methods for calculating risk, but is not a rule.

The EPA is now receiving feedback on the assessment through a public comment period, which it will use in its finalization of the risk assessment. The final risk assessment is expected to inform the EPA's potential future regulatory actions related to PFAS in biosolids under the Clean Water Act.

The draft risk assessment on PFOA and PFOS in biosolids indicates that in some scenarios, biosolids containing PFOA and PFOS may exceed the EPA's acceptable risk thresholds when land applied. The risk was evaluated for people who live on farms where biosolids containing PFOA and PFOS are applied, and who directly consume products grown or raised on these farms. Click here to read the EPA's full draft risk assessment.

In the absence of federal regulations, OWASA has been proactively monitoring our biosolids for PFAS since August 2022. Our analysis has found levels of PFOA in OWASA's biosolids that are later land-applied ranging from "non-detect" to 6.41 ppb; and levels of PFOS ranging from 13 to 34 ppb. You can view the results of OWASA's monitoring program at owasa.org/wastewater-and-biosolids-monitoring/.

OWASA will continue to closely follow the EPA's draft risk assessment developments. We expect that our current and future efforts to reduce PFAS in drinking water will reduce PFAS in wastewater effluent and biosolids. Early testing since PAC optimization of our drinking water treatment process shows lower levels of PFAS in wastewater

effluent and biosolids.

In addition to continuing to evaluate possible sources throughout our collection system, we have engaged consultants at Brown and Caldwell for a more robust study of sources of PFAS discharge into our wastewater system, as well as to identify how PFAS concentrations change throughout our wastewater treatment process. As is our practice, we will share the findings of this analysis on our Wastewater and Biosolids monitoring page.

Thank you for keeping in touch with us on this important issue. Please reach out to us with questions related to this newsletter at info@owasa.org. If you received this message from a friend and would like to receive future PFAS updates from OWASA, sign up here.

www.owasa.org

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