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

Clear Waters: Navigating your PFAS Questions and Concerns

September 26, 2025

Thank you for your interest in how OWASA is addressing PFAS in our community's water. Referred to as "forever chemicals", OWASA is finding out that PFAS is having impacts on OWASA's operations beyond just drinking water. As research and policy develop in real-time, we are committed to better understanding these impacts and communicating with you as we do so.

Existing Treatment Technology Reduces PFAS Levels in OWASA's Drinking Water; Long-Term Strategy to Treat and Destroy PFAS Still Under Consideration

Good news! OWASA refined our use of Powdered Activated Carbon (PAC) to reduce PFAS levels in drinking water that are below future regulatory levels. We are continuing to monitor these results closely to determine whether this trend continues. Results from our quarterly monitoring program, as reported on our PFAS information hub, are summarized below.

PFAS Compound	Quarter 3 2025	Running Annual Average	EPA Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCL)
PFOA	Non-detect	2.3 ppt	4 ppt
PFOS	Non-detect	1.8 ppt	4 ppt
PFHxS	Non-detect	0	10 ppt and as part of hazard index (1)
PFNA	Non-detect	0	10 ppt and as part of hazard index (1)
PFBS	Non-detect	0	and as part of hazard index (1)
HFPO-DA (Gen-X)	Non-detect	0	10 ppt and as part of hazard index (1)

Quarter 3 2025 PFAS Monitoring Data- Finished Drinking Water

Before PFAS was a known problem, PAC was used in our drinking water treatment process to remove natural organic matter and other taste and odor compounds.



More recently, OWASA has experimented with different PAC products in different amounts to better reduce PFAS levels. The results are positive, and are having an immediate impact on the quality of our drinking water.

Although we are encouraged to see these near-term results, OWASA is still considering constructing a PFAS treatment facility using more advanced technology. The use of PAC does not remove PFAS from the environment. Once used, PAC is composted or landfilled, but still contains the PFAS removed during the drinking water treatment process. A pilot program completed last year determined that Granular Activated Carbon (GAC), a media that can be cleaned and reused, would most effectively reduce PFAS in our drinking water and, in doing so, would allow for the removal of PFAS from the environment.

New Lab Technology Will Allow for Quicker Adjustments of PFAS Treatment



OWASA plans to purchase an advanced laboratory tool—a Liquid Chromatography Mass Spectrometer—that can analyze water samples for PFAS. The spectrometer will allow for much faster results—a turnaround time of two days or less, rather than a week or more. Having shorter turnaround times on water sample testing will allow our Water Treatment Plant operators to adjust processes to manage changes in water quality more quickly.

Understanding the Impact of PFAS in Biosolids

Our community's wastewater treatment process results in a nutrient-rich byproduct called biosolids. OWASA has an active land-application program for biosolids that helps to recycle these nutrients by applying them to farms in the region. Unfortunately, PFAS can also accumulate in biosolids. Analysis has detected PFAS in OWASA's biosolids; results from quarterly testing of PFAS levels in our biosolids since 2022 can be found on our PFAS Information Hub.

Although there are no state or federal regulations regarding PFAS and biosolids management, OWASA is proactively working with state officials, consultants, researchers, and local public health agencies to take the following steps:

- Identify, quantify, and reduce or stop the sources of PFAS in our wastewater influent that are increasing PFAS levels in biosolids.
- Assess the potential and impact of an alternative approach to managing our biosolids.
- Develop a private well testing program for households that are located on or adjacent to OWASA's land application fields.

- Evaluate the impact of our land application practices on local private wells.

OWASA Issues Warning on Consuming Fish Caught in Cane Creek Reservoir

As a favorite seasonal fishing spot for many North Carolinians, anglers have enjoyed the healthy game fish population at Cane Creek Reservoir, including crappie, largemouth bass, catfish, sunfish/redear, and bluegill, season after season. Unfortunately, testing completed over the summer on these gamefish showed significant levels of PFAS in all but one gamefish (catfish.)

With the advice of the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), we are cautioning visitors to the lake to avoid eating fish caught in Cane Creek Reservoir. Although DHHS is not issuing a fish consumption advisory at this time, PFAS levels in fish caught in Cane Creek Reservoir were higher than those in the Middle and Lower Cape Fear River, for which DHHS did issue an advisory. Information about the Cape Fear River advisory is posted here, including what to do if you are concerned about your consumption of fish with elevated PFAS levels.



Signage in English and Spanish now at Cane Creek Reservoir.

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.

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