



Town of Bethlehem NY

David VanLuven, Town Supervisor

FAQs about PFAS

If you have questions or concerns about water quality, please call our Water Quality Hotline at 518-694-4640

What are PFAS?

PFAS stands for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, a group of thousands of human-made chemical compounds used since the 1940s for military, space, firefighting, and commercial purposes because of their ability to resist degradation, heat, water, and stains.

Because of their properties, PFAS are used in millions of products, including military equipment, medical devices, firefighting foam, food packaging, and a wide variety of consumer goods, including non-stick cookware, water and stain-resistant clothing, carpet and furniture treatments, and cosmetics.

Because PFAS are extremely durable, they persist in the environment long after they have been thrown out, washed away, or, unfortunately, released into the air, rivers, streams, and groundwater through pollution.

How Common are PFAS?

Because of the widespread use of PFAS and their inability to naturally degrade, they have been discovered in water, air, fish, and soil across the nation and around the globe. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has estimated that approximately 80% of most people's exposure to PFAS comes from consumer goods.

In addition to the products listed earlier, PFAS are found in deodorants, dental floss, contact lenses, toilet paper, menstrual products, even foods like chocolate cake. EPA estimates that nationally 20% of most people's exposure to PFAS comes from drinking water.

Are There Health Risks?

According to the EPA, current scientific research suggests that exposure to certain PFAS may lead to adverse health outcomes. However, research is still ongoing to determine how different levels of exposure to different PFAS can lead to a variety of health effects. Research is also underway to better understand the health effects associated with low levels of exposure to PFAS over long periods of time, especially in children.

Although there are thousands of PFAS compounds, the EPA and several states, including New York, focused on a small number of the substances that may have health effects at very low concentrations, including in drinking water.

PFOA and PFOS are two individual PFAS compounds believed to have adverse health effects at very low concentrations. Recent peer-reviewed science indicates other PFAS and a specific mixture of PFAS could pose a health risk greater than each chemical on its own, so the EPA set drinking water standards for six PFAS in 2024: PFOA, PFOS, PFNA, HFPO-DA (GenX), PFHxS, and PFBS.

The Town of Bethlehem does not produce or use a single drop of PFAS in our treatment processes.

What is being done about PFAS exposure?

While federal regulations for PFAS use in products have not been established, New York State has taken action to eliminate or reduce their use in food packaging, apparel, carpet treatments, and firefighting foam.

In drinking water, the EPA is responsible for setting regulatory limits under the federal Safe Drinking Water Act. The New York State Department of Health is also able to set drinking water standards.

In 2020, New York State established, at the time, the lowest drinking water standards in the nation for PFOA and PFOS at 10 parts per trillion. (A part per trillion is the equivalent of one drop of water in 20 Olympic-sized swimming pools, or 1 second in 32,000 years.)

In 2024, the EPA announced drinking water standards for PFOA and PFOS at 4 parts per trillion (ppt) each; PFNA, HFPO-DA, and PFHxS at 10 ppt each; and a Hazard Index addressing the mixture of PFNA, HFPO-DA (GenX), PFHxS, and PFBS.

Recognizing that this is a historic regulatory change, the EPA set a 2029 effective date so utilities around the country could complete testing and, if necessary, design and construct any additional treatment required for compliance.

More information on the USEPA's drinking water standards can be found [here](#).

More information on the NYS DOH drinking water standards can be found [here](#).

What are the PFAS levels in the Town of Bethlehem's drinking water?

While some regulated PFAS have been detected in the Town of Bethlehem's drinking water sources, the Town's treated drinking water has always been compliant with the New York State standards for PFOA and PFOS established in 2020. While the EPA's PFAS standards do not go in effect until 2029, the Town's treated drinking water is fully compliant with the new standards today.

The Town of Bethlehem's Water Quality reports can be found [here](#).

What PFAS-related actions will the Town take in the future?

The Town of Bethlehem is committed to providing safe, reliable drinking water that protects public health. While the Town of Bethlehem meets all federal drinking water standards (including those that do not take effect until 2029) and state drinking water standards, we are taking the following proactive actions:

- We will continue to participate in all required federal and state testing of our raw/untreated water.
- We will continue to assess additional treatment options for both our New Scotland and Clapper Road Water Treatment Plants to ensure our drinking water continues to be safe and meets all federal and state drinking water standards.
- We will finalize the Source Water Protection Plan for the town's drinking water supplies (being developed with guidance from the NYS Department of Health) and work to implement recommendations to keep potential contaminants from entering our untreated water in the first place.
- We will continue to openly communicate about water testing results, including those for regulated and unregulated PFAS chemicals, to ensure transparency with the public.

Who do I contact with questions or for more information?

➤ Paul Penman, Commissioner of Public Works, ppenman@townofbethlehem.org, 518-439-4955 x1135

➤ Max Ferris, Albany County Div of Environmental Health, Maxwell.Ferris@albanycountyny.gov