

# WATER FACTS

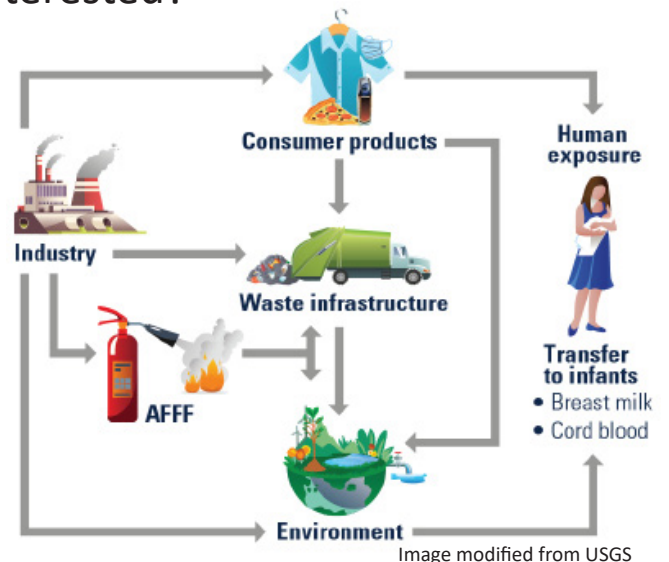
February 2024 - PFAS

## What are PFAS?

Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) are a group of manufactured chemicals, also called “forever chemicals,” that have been used in both industry and consumer products dating back to the 1940s. They are not one specific chemical, but a group of thousands of chemicals with comparable characteristics, only a handful of which have been studied. PFAS break down very slowly (some can take over 1000 years!), and because of this, can build up in humans and our environment over time (US EPA). PFAS can be found in athletic wear, water-resistant fabrics, nonstick cookware, paints, fast-food packaging, personal care products and more (Howell, 2023). Because of its abundance, PFAS have now been found in drinking water, soil near waste sites, water bodies, food, and dust. According to the USGS, “Water samples from 161 Pennsylvania rivers and streams were tested for 33 different PFAS and 76% of the studied streams contained at least one of these chemicals.”

## Why are we interested?

Most people have been exposed to PFAS due to its persistent, prevalent nature. While most known exposures are low, they can be high if someone is exposed to a constant source of it over long periods of time. Specifically in the Chesapeake Bay, high levels of PFAS have been found in striped bass, blue crabs, and oysters. These toxic chemicals cannot be seen, smelled, or tasted but find their way into water bodies from industrial sites, military bases, wastewater, stormwater, agriculture, air pollution, etc. (Chesapeake Bay Foundation).



## Understanding PFAS

Because PFAS is a growing topic of interest and concern, there are constantly new developments being made in the research of long-term effects, the testing of remediation methods (e.g. filtration systems), and the development of rules that can lead to enforcement in the future (notably for drinking water). Aside from limiting exposure to products known to include PFAS, one actionable step you can take now is to stay informed on PFAS prevalence and research - the EPA's PFAS Analytic Tools (<https://echo.epa.gov/trends/pfas-tools>) is one recommended resource which tracks the reporting, testing and occurrences in communities throughout the nation.

### CITATIONS

Chesapeake Bay Foundation. (n.d.). *Chemical contamination*. <https://www.cbf.org/issues/chemical-contamination/index.html/>

Howell, M. (2023, September). *What products contain pfas & how to protect yourself*. Consumer Notice. <https://www.consumernotice.org/>

US EPA. (2021, October 14). Our current understanding of the human health and environmental risks of pfas [Overviews and Factsheets]. <https://www.epa.gov/pfas/our-current-understanding-human-health-and-environmental-risks-pfas/>

U.S. Geological Survey. (2023, August). PFAS chemicals detected in many rivers and streams across Pennsylvania. <https://www.usgs.gov/>

