

## **Area utilities respond to new EPA guidelines on chemicals in water supplies** *Limited water testing reveals trace amounts of PFAS chemicals in the region*

Auburn, Beulah, Loachapoka, Opelika, and Smiths Station, AL – July 18, 2022 – Water utilities across the region are reviewing water testing and treatment processes in response to the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) June announcement of revised guidelines on the levels of certain compounds in water supplies. The new EPA interim lifetime health advisories are intended to better manage risks from a group of man-made chemicals called PFAS (Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances). There are thousands of variations of these PFAS compounds, and the EPA announcement addresses four specifically: PFOA, PFOS, GenX Chemicals, and PFBS. Only trace levels of PFAS have been found in limited samples taken from water sources in the Auburn-Opelika area and surrounding communities.

### **New EPA lifetime health advisories**

According to the EPA, most people are exposed to PFAS through consumer products. These chemicals have been used in firefighting foams, industrial processes, and manufacturing of carpets, clothing, furniture upholstery, cleaning and cookware products, and packaging for food and other materials. Drinking water can be an additional source of exposure in communities where these chemicals have entered water sources such as wells, rivers, or lakes.

Lifetime health advisories are non-enforceable and non-regulatory contaminant levels at which no adverse health effects are expected over a lifetime of drinking water exposure. There is no existing federal regulation for PFAS in drinking water supplies, and our treated water currently meets public health standards under the federal *Safe Drinking Water Act* as enforced by the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM). The issuance of a health advisory is commonly the first step by the EPA in developing/setting regulatory limits, which can be a lengthy process.

The EPA’s new interim lifetime health advisory levels for the PFAS compounds are significantly lower than the agency’s previous recommendations (70 parts per trillion) and so microscopic that they are below current accepted laboratory detection levels. This means that it is possible for PFOA or PFOS to be present in drinking water at levels that exceed the lifetime health advisories even if current testing technology indicates no presence of these chemicals.

<b>Chemical</b>	<b>Previous EPA Health Advisories (parts per trillion)</b>	<b>New EPA Health Advisories (parts per trillion)</b>
PFOA	70.0 Combined	0.004
PFOS		0.02
GenX Chemicals	NA	10.0
PFBS	NA	2000.0

Although an official timeline is unknown, the EPA has stated that they could set actual regulatory limits for these compounds as early as the fall of 2022.

## **National water industry response**

Water utilities and professional associations – such as the [American Water Works Association](#) (AWWA) and [Water Environment Federation](#) (WEF) are evaluating the national and local impacts of these advisories, and many have issued public statements in response.

“EPA’s decision to reduce these health advisory levels from 70 ppt to as low as 0.004 ppt will have a significant impact on water utilities who receive these chemicals from industry and consumers and are not generators themselves,” said WEF President Jamie Eichenberger. “We encourage EPA to continue to work towards source control to prevent these contaminants from entering our waterways in the first place and are looking forward to working with EPA to develop science-based effluent limits and drinking water standards that protect public health and the environment without placing an undue burden on our utilities and ratepayers.”

## **Lee County area utilities’ actions**

Limited testing in the Lee County region has revealed water samples with trace levels of PFAS compounds that individually range from below detection limits to 12 parts per trillion. For perspective, one part per trillion is equal to one drop in 500,000 barrels of water. The lower the levels, the lower the risk.

Area water utilities are gathering information from national water industry experts and regulatory agencies to evaluate ways to identify and report the presence of these chemicals at the new recommended levels as well as examine potential measures to limit exposure. The EPA acknowledges that water systems may not be able to eliminate all risks from PFAS, however the goal is to do what is possible to help reduce risks.

Area utilities participating in this news release are posting online data and information specific to their water sources based on the limited testing conducted to date. Website links and addresses to the data provided for each system are below:

**Auburn Water Works Board Data** - <https://www.auburnalabama.org/water-resource-management/water-operations/PFAS/>

**Beulah Utilities District Data** - <https://www.owwb.com/beulahResults>

**Loachapoka Water Authority Data** - <https://www.owwb.com/loachapokaResults>

**Opelika Utilities Data** - <https://www.owwb.com/news>

**Smiths Water and Sewer Authority Data** - <https://www.owwb.com/smithsStationResults>

**ADEM Data regarding PFAS testing results statewide can be found here:**

<http://adem.alabama.gov/programs/water/drinkingwater/files/Combined2020and2022AIRresultsMRL.pdf>

Joint statement from area utilities for Auburn, Beulah, Loachapoka, Opelika, and Smiths Station:

*Clean, safe drinking water is our top priority. Like other water utilities nationwide, we are studying the EPA lifetime health advisories and our next steps. Additional research and testing are needed to determine the levels of these compounds in area water supplies, report that*

information to the public, and evaluate effective and feasible options to reduce any risk to our communities.

### Federal funding

The EPA also announced an initial \$1 billion in grant funding for 2022 through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law that can be used to reduce PFAS in drinking water in underserved communities nationwide. It is unknown how much of that federal infrastructure funding will be available for our local and regional mitigation and treatment measures.

For more information on the new PFAS advisories, the EPA has questions and answers available online at: <https://www.epa.gov/sdwa/questions-and-answers-drinking-water-health-advisories-pfoa-pfos-genx-chemicals-and-pfbs>

### UTILITY CONTACT INFORMATION:

Auburn Water Works Board  
Water Resource Management Department  
<https://www.auburnalabama.org/water-resource-management/water-operations/>  
501 West Samford Avenue  
Auburn, AL 36830  
(334) 501-3060



Beulah Utilities District  
<https://beulahutilities.com/services.html>  
5320 Lee Road 270  
Valley, AL 36854  
(334) 737-5374

Loachapoka Water Authority  
<http://lwawater.com/>  
4742 Lee Road 188  
Loachapoka, AL 36832  
(334) 887-3329

## LOACHAPOKA WATER AUTHORITY

Opelika Utilities  
<https://www.owwb.com/>  
4055 Water Street  
Opelika, AL 36801  
(334) 705-5500



Smiths Water and Sewer Authority  
<https://www.smithswater.com/>  
2848 Lee Road 243 #3885  
Smiths Station, AL 36877  
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