



Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Wednesday, Nov. 1, 2023

DEM POSTS DRAFT REPORT ON “FOREVER CHEMICALS” – PFAS – FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

PROVIDENCE, RI — The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) has posted a draft report detailing the presence of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances – known as PFAS – in the Rhode Island environment. PFAS often are referred to as “forever chemicals” because they resist typical biological, chemical, and physical degradation processes and remain in the environment and in the human body far longer than other toxic contaminants.

[The PFAS in Drinking Water, Groundwater, and Surface Waters Act](#), passed by the Rhode Island General Assembly and signed by Governor Dan McKee in June of 2022, directed DEM to conduct a statewide investigation on potential sources of PFAS and publish a plan for a statewide source investigation by Nov. 1, 2023. Once it incorporates public comments into the draft and finalizes it, DEM must implement a plan of recommended actions for further PFAS source investigation by Jan. 1, 2024, according to the law. [Members of the public may read the over 200-page draft report and comment on it by clicking here.](#) The 30-day public comment period ends Dec. 1.

“PFAS are one of the world’s most intractable pollutants, highly complex, and found just about everywhere,” said DEM Director Terry Gray. “This report consolidates important scientific work on the extent of PFAS contamination in Rhode Island. DEM looks forward to working with legislative leaders on solutions to remediating locations contaminated by PFAS and protecting Rhode Islanders and the environment from the effects of PFAS.”

“PFAS chemicals are ubiquitous in consumer products, despite the known dangers and all the questions that remain about their long-term effects or how to rid them from our bodies or the environment,” said Representative June Speakman (District 68 – Warren, Bristol), House sponsor of the law. “The first step in combatting this health hazard is determining the extent of PFAS contamination throughout Rhode Island. I look forward to reading this report and asking questions, and I appreciate DEM’s efforts in producing it on time.”

“The presence of toxic chemicals in the environment poses significant health and ecological concerns,” said Senate sponsor Senator Walter S. Felag Jr. (District 10 – Warren, Bristol, Tiverton). “Studies have linked these chemicals to adverse health effects such as low infant birth weights, asthma, cancer, and thyroid

hormone disruptions. It appears that the draft DEM report establishes extensive baseline data, which is imperative information for the General Assembly to have to continue to respond to the scourge of PFAS.”

The DEM report identifies the following locations as requiring “significant DEM management focus over the next several years:” industrial sites including textile manufacturing, Superfund sites, US Department of Defense sites, landfills and dumps (both formerly licensed and unlicensed), fire stations and training facilities, airports, and wastewater treatment facilities (including discharges and biosolids).

Nearly everyone has low levels of PFAS detectable in their blood. PFAS are a large group of manmade chemicals that repel oil and water. They have been used since the 1940s to make products water, grease, and stain-resistant, and they have been used in firefighting foams. While many PFAS chemicals are now banned, they do not easily break down and can build up in the environment. There are many potential sources of PFAS. They include food packaging, soil, dust, air, some consumer products, and drinking water. Studies have shown that PFAS can build up in the body and can have negative health effects. It is not possible to eliminate exposure to PFAS entirely because PFAS are present at low levels in many ways in the environment. However, exposure to PFAS in drinking water can be minimized through targeted water treatment efforts.

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