

One of the most pressing issues facing our community today is PFAS. Groton is just one of many communities in Massachusetts that is being impacted. PFAS does not break down over time and continues to accumulate in our environment. PFAS creates a health risks at very low levels and is tied to developmental defects, cancers and immune system issues. The chemicals have been used since the 1950s and are currently in used in residential products from dental floss, packaging, cookwear, clothing and electronics.

PFAS in Groton

In December of 2019 MassDEP proposed PFAS6 testing requirements for all public water supplies. While Groton was not required to begin testing until 2021, the Groton Water Department began testing for 18 different PFAS compounds in October of 2019. PFAS6 concentrations in Groton have generally been between one and three nanograms per liter (ng/L). No actions are required at concentrations below 20 ng/l (which is equivalent to 20 parts per trillion or ppt) and monitoring is ongoing. Recent updates to our water system to remove manganese are being completed currently and potential future needs regarding PFAS have been considered.

The Groton Dunstable High School is served by a public water supply (PWS ID# 2115010-01G) which is operated by the Groton Dunstable Regional School District (GDRSD). March 2022 testing of this public water supply found PFAS6 concentrations of 490 (ng/L) at the High School and concentrations up to 123 ng/L at fifteen nearby private wells. MassDEP has determined that the PFAS concentrations are attributable to use of aqueous film forming firefighting foam at the High School on June 17, 2003 to extinguish a fire, which included materials for the track construction. MassDEP has identified two potentially responsible parties: CR Klewin Northeast – the responsible party that bears legal responsibility for the site under MGL Ch 21E Section 5(a) (5) and the Groton Dunstable Regional School District as site owner. Attempts to find and hold CR Klewin Northeast responsible have been unsuccessful and the GDRSD must find solutions.

MassDEP has required several immediate actions by the GDRSD: additional PFAS testing of private wells in 500' increments until no PFAS6 is detected; provision of bottled water at the High School and residences with detectable PFAS6 levels; and installation and upkeep of a POET system at any residence with PFAS6 exceeding 20 ng/L. Ultimately an alternative water source needs to be provided for the High School and impacted private wells.

Because of the MassDEP requirements and the alarming long-term impacts of PFAS we are exploring different solutions. There are currently two alternatives that are being explored for final decision. Per the GDRSD Regional Agreement capital expenditures are divided between Groton and Dunstable based on enrollment. As Groton students make up approximately 77% of the student body that is the estimated percentage of the solution costs that Groton property owners will bear. Our hope is to access grant funds and no interest loans in conjunction with this project The estimated project costs will be in addition to the costs for testing and interim compliance with MassDEP requirements.

One alternative is to extend the Town of Groton municipal water system from the center of Groton up Chicopee Row to the High School area. This alternative requires additional piping over the 3.5 distance at an anticipated cost of approximately \$13M. This approach requires State permits to transfer water between drainage basins, which is anticipated to take up to two years. Currently the State has indicated no ability to accelerate this permitting timeframe and construction is likely to take an additional year. A temporary solution for the next three years will add complexity and cost to the alternative. At Spring Town Meeting voters approved spending up to \$16.8M on this solution, allowing for design and permitting efforts to begin prior to the next Town Meeting in Fall of 2023.

The second alternative under consideration is to utilize the Town of Pepperell water system as a source to supply this area. While this requires only 1.1 miles of piping and has a lower cost, approximately \$4M, the Town of Pepperell system has PFAS levels around 13ppt. This option requires no inter-basin transfer so permitting and construction are anticipated to take a year.

The Groton Water Commissioners have indicated that on-site PFAS treatment will be required – this will prevent PFAS exposure for users and will prevent the addition of more PFAS, via septic system or irrigation, into the High School area groundwater. Ultimately, we anticipate incurring additional costs when the Pepperell water system requires overall PFAS treatment.

PFAS in Massachusetts

A PFAS Task Force was established by the Massachusetts Legislature and issued their final report in April of 2022. This report included multiple recommendations (see the attached excerpt and the entire report at file:///U:/HD5054.pdf) and recognizes that this is a Statewide Issue which we are only beginning to understand. There are many PFAS compounds beyond the six that are currently regulated in Massachusetts and State and Federal testing and tolerances continue to be reviewed and updates are anticipated. There are currently no testing or remediation requirements for private wells in the Commonwealth. Education of the public is needed and funding for testing and solutions should be made available immediately, particularly in communities that have already been disproportionately impacted by environmental hazards.

Our collective understanding of PFAS and the impacts is expanding rapidly. Testing and remediation of PFAS issues can only be a small part of the solution while these products continue to be used, sold and produced in Massachusetts. Currently there are a handful of PFAS uses for which there are no effective alternatives, such as firefighter turnout gear. In many other products there is the ability to reduce and eliminate PFAS compounds.

There are currently four PFAS related bills before the Legislature – two in the Senate and two in the House. All four bills work to establish public funds to assist with testing and remediation. All four of these important bills have been referred to committees (Agriculture and Public Health) and hearings have been held in recent weeks.

H101 and S39 are directed at protecting the soil and farms from PFAS contamination. These propose to set concentration limits for PFAS in retail fertilizers, mulch and soil amendment products and require labelling on any that contain PFAS below the banned limit. Groton Representative Margaret Scarsdale has signed onto H101 as a petitioner. Neither Representative Danillo Sena nor Senator John Cronin have signed onto these bills.

H2197 and S1356 are targeted at reducing PFAS in other products and requiring labelling on products containing added PFAS. These bills would prohibit, beginning January 1, 2026, PFAS in food packaging, child carseats, cookware, fabric, personal care products, rugs, upholstered furniture and children's products. Adding PFAS to any products would be banned effective January 1, 2030 unless a manufacturer is issued an exemption by the Department of Public Health. Both Groton Representatives Margaret Scarsdale and Danillo Sena have signed onto H2197; Senator John Cronin has not signed onto S1356.

It is imperative that our elected officials, locally and at the State and Federal levels understand the tremendous risk that PFAS creates for our environment and communities. While there are no easy answers, support for these important bills and commitment to the Task Force Recommendations are two steps that must be taken immediately.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout 2021, the PFAS Interagency Task Force held nine public hearings and heard testimony from researchers, advocacy groups, community members, municipal officials, state agencies, public water systems, legislators, and other stakeholders on the issues surrounding PFAS. After careful consideration of the extent of PFAS contamination in the state, evidence of the health and environmental impacts associated with PFAS exposure, and the distinct challenges of addressing PFAS, the PFAS Interagency Task Force proposes the following set of recommendations for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to protect residents and the environment from PFAS contamination.

FUND PFAS DETECTION AND REMEDIATION

1. Fund MassDEP and DPH to conduct PFAS testing in drinking water, groundwater, surface water, wastewater, residuals, soil, air, fish tissue, and additional environmental media that may be exposure pathways for PFAS.
2. Fund MassDEP to conduct PFAS testing and investigations in locations with known or suspected PFAS releases to identify sources of contamination.
3. Fund MassDEP and DPH to provide PFAS-related technical assistance to municipalities and public water systems.
4. Appropriate additional funding to the Clean Water Trust for PFAS remediation projects.
5. Establish a PFAS Remediation Fund that provides grants to municipalities, public water systems, and homeowners for capital and ongoing costs for PFAS remediation.

SUPPORT ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMUNITIES

6. Appropriate funding to the Clean Water Trust to increase the loan forgiveness percentage for PFAS remediation projects that are eligible for the Disadvantaged Communities program.
7. Direct DPH to conduct outreach with community stakeholders to ensure affected residents have information in accessible language regarding their exposure to PFAS through drinking water, fish, and other sources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

PHASE OUT PFAS IN CONSUMER PRODUCTS

8. Prohibit the sale of consumer products with intentionally added PFAS by 2030. Identify priority consumer products with intentionally added PFAS for an earlier phase-out, including textiles, food packaging, and children's products. Allow DPH to grant temporary exemptions to consumer products for which PFAS alternatives do not currently exist and that DPH and MassDEP have determined to be environmentally preferable products or essential to the health and safety of the Commonwealth.
9. Require manufacturers of consumer products containing intentionally added PFAS for sale in Massachusetts to notify the state using the Interstate Chemicals Clearinghouse beginning in 2025.
10. Require manufacturers of consumer products containing intentionally added PFAS for sale in Massachusetts to add labels indicating these products contain PFAS.
11. Fund TURI to provide research grants to identify and develop safer alternatives to PFAS in consumer products that receive exemptions from DPH and in firefighter turnout gear.

EXPAND PFAS REGULATION

12. Define PFAS as "fluorinated organic chemicals containing at least one fully fluorinated carbon atom" for the regulation of PFAS in consumer products.
13. Encourage MassDEP to establish standards for PFAS in drinking water and groundwater beyond PFAS6 as part of its upcoming review cycle.
14. Direct MassDEP to evaluate the appropriateness of incorporating PFAS conditions in groundwater discharge permits for industrial wastewater.
15. Direct MassDEP to evaluate the appropriateness of establishing pre-treatment requirements and limits for PFAS in effluent for industrial surface water discharge permits.

ENCOURAGE PRIVATE WELL PFAS TESTING AND REMEDIATION

16. Create a funding program for communities to receive and distribute loans for private well PFAS remediation.
17. Identify strategies to lower the cost of PFAS testing for private well owners.
18. Encourage municipalities to require PFAS testing during transfer of property with private wells and with new well permits.

RECOMMENDATIONS

SUPPORT FIREFIGHTERS AND LOCAL FIRE DEPARTMENTS

19. Fund a second round of the AFFF Take-Back Program to collect and dispose of AFFF, clean up and decontaminate storage facilities and equipment exposed to AFFF, and purchase fluorine free foam for fire departments.
20. Prohibit the use of AFFF for firefighting training and maintenance.
21. Support efforts to reduce the use of AFFF in emergency responses and require fire departments to notify MassDEP of releases of AFFF. Explore alternative practices to minimize potential environmental impacts where such use is federally required.
22. Require manufacturers of firefighter turnout gear to provide written notice of the inclusion of PFAS in turnout gear to the purchaser at time of sale.
23. Review standards for turnout gear, support efforts to identify and develop turnout gear that is completely free from PFAS, and ban the sale of turnout gear with PFAS once there are viable alternatives in the marketplace.
24. Increase funding for DFS and MFA to conduct cancer awareness trainings and refer firefighters to screenings for cancers associated with PFAS exposure.
25. Direct the Massachusetts Cancer Registry to retroactively standardize “firefighter” as an occupation and to collect information on occupational exposure to PFAS.

ADDRESS PFAS CONTAMINATION ACCOUNTABILITY

26. Identify a path for adopting reasonable limitations for liability claims against homeowners and municipalities for PFAS contamination.
27. Continue evaluating potential claims against PFAS manufacturers to seek remediation costs and other damages for PFAS contamination.
28. Direct MassDEP to work with DOD to implement their 2021 guidance to sample public and private drinking water wells and to initiate removal actions to address exceedances of the state MCL.

ENHANCE PUBLIC AWARENESS OF PFAS

29. Direct MassDEP and DPH to build upon existing efforts to jointly conduct public education and awareness campaigns around PFAS contamination, health impacts, and state efforts to address PFAS.
30. Direct DPH to build upon existing efforts to provide guidance to health care providers and local governments on how to communicate the health impacts of PFAS, exposure pathways, and safe drinking water levels to patients and the public.