

PFOA Exceedance – Frequently Asked Questions

Why am I receiving a notice of PFOA Violation? What is this about?

You are receiving notice because you receive water from our Park Avenue Wellfield which had a recent exceedance for PFOA. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) set a new drinking water standard of 14 parts per trillion for Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOA) in June 2020. This was lowered from the former health advisory standard of 40 ppt. The new lowered standard represents some of the toughest standards in the nation.

Why am I getting this notice now?

Our 3rd quarter sample from the Park Avenue wellfield facility in South Plainfield, which supplies groundwater, had a result of 36 ppt. When averaged with the 1st (25 ppt) and 2nd (23 ppt) quarter results, this number put us over the MCL (21 ppt) standard no matter what the results of the 4th quarter will be.

What is PFOA?

Perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) is a member of the group of chemicals called per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), which are pervasive across the country because of their many commercial and industrial uses. PFAS are used in production of some non-stick cookware, in waterproof and stain proof coatings, in “leak-proof” coatings on food packaging materials, in fire-fighting foams, and in other uses.

How did it get in my water?

PFAS can enter drinking water through industrial release to water, air, or soil; discharges from sewage treatment plants; land application of contaminated sludge; and use of fire-fighting foam. It’s important to know that as water utilities, **we are not producers of PFAS**, instead, we now are faced with finding ways to treat these traces of PFAS which find their way into groundwater supplies. In fact, Middlesex has initiated litigation in U.S. District Court against the alleged polluter responsible for the presence of PFAS in our groundwater supplies and our intent is to recover the capital costs of PFAS remediation.

Is my water safe? Is PFOA Harmful?

Consuming drinking water with PFOA at or somewhat above the MCL does not pose an immediate health risk, but when consumed over many, many years. (one in a million chance) can lead to adverse health outcomes such as developmental delays, disruption of hormones in the body, low infant birth weight, adverse effects on the immune system, among other effects. To put this in perspective -- 1 part per trillion is equal to 1 drop of water in 20 Olympic sized swimming pools. As always, we encourage those with severely compromised health conditions to check with their health care provider.

What is MSEX Doing about PFOA?

MWC had already been testing for PFAS as part of the USEPA’s Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring program and we have been reporting on detections in our Annual Water Quality Reports since 2008. In 2019, we began evaluating treatment options to remove PFOA from our groundwater supply. A new treatment plant at our wellfield has been designed, is currently under construction, and is expected to be placed into service in 2023. More information about this plant’s progress will be shared in the future.

Does this Exceedance affect all customers of Middlesex Water?

No. Only a portion of our service area, served by the Company’s Park Avenue Treatment Plant is affected by this public notice. The impacted municipalities are South Plainfield, Edison, Metuchen, Woodbridge, Clark and Rahway and in some cases, only a portion of those towns are affected. Please see the map on our website at <https://www.middlesexwater.com/water-quality/> which highlights the areas/streets within the notification area and provides additional information.