

Municipal Authority of Westmoreland County

Board Meeting

September 17, 2021

12:00pm

24 Park and Pool Road, New Stanton, PA 15672

Good afternoon Board of Directors and Authority Staff,

My name is Talor Musil and I am the Health Policy Manager at the non-profit Women for a Healthy Environment (WHE). WHE educates individuals about environmental exposures to public health, provides action steps communities can take to mitigate those risks, and advocates for solutions that create a better tomorrow for all. Through educational programming, technical assistance and advocacy, our organization focuses on creating healthy homes, schools and early learning centers. My comments today are regarding the July 2021 PFAS contamination in McKeesport, PA after PFAS-containing firefighting foam back flowed into a hydrant being used to contain a fire at a mechanic's shop.

Since 2009, WHE has educated over 25,000 individuals across Southwestern PA regarding persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic chemicals. The Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) was passed in 1976 to limit harmful chemicals in our environment and initiate safety monitoring. But this law was woefully broken and later reforms have fallen short to shift America's reactive model of proving harm of a chemical to one that ensures the safety of a chemical before it is placed in production. Since TSCA's passage, more than 86,000 chemicals have been approved for commerce, but only several hundred have been reviewed by the EPA.

PFAS is a group of man-made chemicals that includes PFOA, PFOS, GenX, and many other chemicals. It has been manufactured and used around the globe since the 1940s. It is associated with effects such as:

- Developmental delays
- Cancer (e.g., testicular, kidney),
- Liver effects (e.g., tissue damage and enzyme changes),
- Immune effects (e.g., decreased vaccine response in children), and
- Thyroid effects (e.g., increased cholesterol levels).

Despite this knowledge, the only protective measure taken by the federal government thus far has been a lifetime health advisory of 70 ppt in water for two of the oldest and most studied PFAS: PFOA and PFOS. These two substances were identified in McKeesport water this summer.

As a community organization active in McKeesport, WHE applauds the Authority for their prompt communication about the incident on their website. Still, it is critical that there be ongoing community education about how residents can protect themselves from exposure, clarification about the testing methods and results, and public plans to protect drinking water from PFAS contamination. The affected area is at the confluence of the Monongahela River and its tributary and McKeesport's source of drinking water, the Youghiogheny River. Soil and groundwater contamination is likely on and nearby the

area sprayed with foam as well as the areas where hydrants were flushed into the street. Studies have found that levels of PFAS in water may increase over time. If the “building blocks” (or, fluorinated precursors) of PFAS are present in the water, they can later transform to PFAS ([Liu and Avendano, 2013](#); [Lee et al., 2014](#)).

We feel strongly that the following questions must be answered by the Authority:

- How were hot spot customers, hydrants and blowoff areas selected for testing, and what do each of these identifiers mean?
- How was the “Average PFAS Control” level of 11ppt determined?
- How will the Authority go about conducting Quarterly Monitoring near the contamination site, as well as downstream testing of the Yough River?
- What is the estimated amount of PFAS-containing firefighting foam that was released on the site of the fire (NOT the amount that backflowed into the hydrant)?
- What protective measures will be put in place to ensure this firefighting foam will not backflow into another Westmoreland fire hydrant?
- How will the Authority ensure residents are safe from PFAS and equip with the resources to protect themselves?

These concerns are about more than this single incident in the lower 10th Ward of McKeesport. They are about a pattern of repeated contamination. Within Allegheny County, the groundwater contamination has occurred in a handful of communities after the use of PFAS firefighting foam at the Airport and Military Bases.

In closing, Women for a Healthy Environment recommend the following:

- Equipping residents with the information they need to make informed decisions about their drinking water;
- Offering free PFAS testing for any concerned resident Service Area;
- Ensuring Water Authority leadership is aware of the public health risks and evidence-based interventions related to PFAS.
- Supporting PA policies that ban PFAS-containing firefighting foams under any circumstance.

Thank you,

Talor Musil
Health Policy Manager
Women for a Healthy Environment

