

LOCAL

Forever chemicals found in household dust in New Castle, Gore is sued for pollution



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Delaware News Journal

Published 4:54 a.m. ET Jan. 15, 2025

Forever chemicals continue to be a major focus of environmental and public health groups around the country, and Delaware has been the focal point of recent developments in their research and litigation.

A study conducted by the federal government found forever chemicals were persistent in dust and blood serum samples in New Castle.

Additionally, a new lawsuit has been filed against a Delaware company alleging that its sites knowingly used and polluted local environments with the chemical.

What are forever chemicals?

PFAS, which stands for per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances, are a class of chemicals that have been used in a wide variety of manufacturing processes over the years that potentially cause adverse health impacts upon consumption or inhalation. Due to their longevity in the environment, they often are referred to as forever chemicals.

Commonly known sources of forever chemicals include firefighting foams, wire insulation, cleaners, textiles and other consumer products.

Experts warn that PFAS contamination can cause adverse health effects. It has been classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer as a “possible carcinogen.”

Elevated levels can lead to increased cholesterol levels and liver problems. Pregnant people exposed to elevated PFAS levels are considered to be at a higher risk of increased

blood pressure or pre-eclampsia, and that may result in lower birth weights in newborns.

New Castle study finds PFAS in household dust

A study was conducted by the U.S Department of Health and Human Services' Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry that tested different mediums for “forever chemicals” in Westfield, Massachusetts and in New Castle.

The agency was investigating these two sites to identify non-drinking water exposure sources of PFAS, and chose New Castle for its close proximity to industrial sites and history with PFAS contamination.

“[More than 25%] of residents in the (Delaware) sampling frame live in areas that are highly impacted by a combination of environmental burdens, social factors and pre-existing chronic health conditions,” the study said.

Samples were collected in 2022 from indoor air, household vacuums, surface dust and soil to look for seven types of forever chemicals. Some property owners wore a silicone wristband to characterize how much exposure to PFAS the participants encountered during daily activities.

The study indicated that there is a direct correlation between an individual's exposure to forever chemicals and the concentration of forever chemicals in their blood.

The study also found that forever chemicals were found in settled dust, household vacuum dust, soil, surface wipes, produce, indoor and outdoor air, as well the silicone wristbands worn by participants.

A representative from the Delaware Department of Public Health stated that it would work in tandem with Delaware's Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control to use the report's findings to investigate local sources and exposures to PFAS, as well as to develop immediate and long-term mitigation strategies.

There are no federal regulations dictating “healthy” limits in these spaces, so the study was just testing for basic detection, but the results show that forever chemicals are potentially more pervasive than once assumed.

Offshore Wind: US Wind files appeal against Sussex County Council's permit denial.
Here are the details

Maryland sues Gore for PFAS contamination

On Dec. 18, 2024, the state of Maryland filed a lawsuit against W.L Gore and Associates, alleging contamination from 13 of its 14 sites in neighboring Cecil County.

The suit not only alleges that Gore caused widespread PFAS contamination from its 14 facilities in and around Elkton, Maryland, all of which are within 10 miles of each other, and that the company knew of the environmental and public health risks.

The state is seeking recovery costs for investigations and remediation of the contamination and to obtain damages for injuries resulting from the contamination.

Since 1958, Gore has been using “PTFE”, which is a type of “forever chemical,” in its manufacturing processes. For decades, these chemicals were purchased from DuPont and 3M.

According to the lawsuit, since at least 1980, these companies had data or internal confirmations related to the environmental health risks associated with the chemicals, but allegedly concealed these results from the public and government agencies.

“W.L Gore & Associates has a long history of contaminating the environment and prioritizing profit over the health of the communities in which it operates,” said a statement from attorneys representing the citizens in separate litigation against the company. “Since filing [a separate 2022 class action suit] against the company ... we’ve discovered the toxic poly-fluoroalkyl substances, also known as ‘forever chemicals’ polluting the water are even more widespread than initial data suggest.”

Delaware's PFAS history

Delaware and its incorporated companies are now no stranger to lawsuits regarding alleged PFAS contamination.

Over the years, private wells and surface waters across Delaware have been found to contain some form of PFAS, which were only recently regulated by the EPA.

New Castle in particular has been the subject of investigation into PFAS contamination, after it was found that public water wells surrounding the New Castle Airport had levels of forever chemicals that exceeded “lifetime health advisory levels” set by the EPA.

In 2021, DuPont, Chemours and Corteva were ordered by the Delaware Department of Justice to pay nearly \$100 million to the state of Delaware for long-term contamination to the state's environment.

Delaware Attorney General Kathy Jennings announced in 2023 that the Delaware Department of Justice had filed a lawsuit against 13 chemical companies who used PFAS in operations, seeking monetary damages to remediate natural resources and further monitor water supplies.

Recommendations to stay safe

The Department of Public Health said that the public should be mindful of the products they purchase, and to limit PFAS exposure when possible.

“Limiting your use of coated fast-food packaging, plastic or non-biodegradable storage containers, as well as opting out of stain-resistant treatments when cleaning carpets is also helpful,” the department said.

Other methods like wet dusting and using a HEPA filter when vacuuming are some of the best ways to prevent PFAS dust contamination in your home. Carbon air filters for the home's HVAC system also can help reduce PFAS from being recycled in home air systems, according to the Department of Public Health.

The federal study also listed some recommendations for residents concerned about potential health impacts:

- 1.** Be aware of consumer items in your home that may contain PFAS and reduce your use of those products (coated fast food containers, stain-resistant treatments)
- 2.** Contact the Consumer Product Safety Commission at 800-638-2772 with questions about PFAS exposure in consumer products
- 3.** Discuss any health concerns or symptoms with your healthcare provider
- 4.** Follow the advice of your health care provider and recommendations for checkups, vaccinations, pre-natal care and health screening tests for you and your child
- 5.** For additional information about environmental exposures and children's health, contact the Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units, a nationwide network of experts in reproductive and children's environmental health

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