

What NC's Forever Chemicals Investigation Means For You

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The battle over “forever chemicals” continues in North Carolina. Attorney General Josh Stein announced a formal investigation on August 10 in a press release.

“This investigation is about protecting people from current and future PFAS contamination and restoring North Carolina’s damaged natural resources,” Stein said in the release.

The statement says the AG will look into “manufacturers and other parties responsible” for contamination in the state.

What are “forever chemicals?”

Per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, are man-made compounds. Manufacturers use PFAS to make nonstick coatings, fire suppression foams, and many other common products. Companies also use PFAS in a number of industrial processes.



Image by [Ralf Vetterle](#) from [Pixabay](#)

Scientists have found that PFAS enter the environment in several different ways. The most common way forever chemicals get into the environment is when they drain into rivers and streams. However, scientists have also found that PFAS enter the air through emissions. From there, they make their way to rainwater.

People refer to PFAS as “forever chemicals” because they do not break down in the environment. Instead, these chemicals build up in the air, water, and soil.

Forever chemicals do not break down in animals, either. They accumulate over time and work their way into the food chain.

How PFAS effect humans

The EPA has a section of its website dedicated to [PFAS information](#). In that section, the agency details known effects of exposure to forever chemicals.

“PFAS stay in the human body for long periods of time,” it says. “As a result, as people get exposed to PFAS from different sources over time, the level of PFAS in their bodies may increase to the point where they suffer from adverse health effects.”



Image by [Henryk Niestrój](#) from [Pixabay](#).

Studies have shown a number of negative health effects associated with PFAS exposure. The EPA says that, “Studies indicate that PFOA and PFOS can cause reproductive and developmental, liver and kidney, and immunological effects in laboratory animals.”

The most consistent effect observed in human studies is elevated cholesterol. Lowered infant birth weights, immune system effects, and thyroid hormone disruption (for PFOS) were also observed in more limited findings.

Forever chemicals in NC–A history

A source notified the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services of tainted drinking water in June, 2017. After that, a follow-up study, led by NC State University, found GenX in the lower Cape Fear River. The study identified the Chemours facility in Fayetteville as the source of the GenX.



Image by [Jay Curley](#) from [Pixabay](#)

Later, the NC Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ) found GenX in private wells on land near the Chemours plant. NCDEQ also found GenX and other PFAS in air emissions, rainwater, and bodies of water close the Chemours facility.

Previous legal action

In February 2019 a Bladen County Superior Court judge approved a consent order against Chemours. The order requires Chemours to pay \$12 million. It also demands that the company accelerate its efforts to remove contaminants from the Cape Fear River, air, and groundwater.

“This ruling provides a clear timeline and certainty for the people of the Cape Fear River Basin,” said NCDEQ Secretary Michael S. Regan at the time.



NCDEQ Secretary Michael S. Regan. *Photo Courtesy of NCDEQ*

In addition, the consent order forces Chemours to submit monthly emissions reports for GenX and other PFAS. The order does not release Chemours or any other entity from future liability. It also does not prevent NCDEQ from taking future action against the company.

Many North Carolina residents felt the consent order did not go far enough. One of those residents is Hope Taylor, executive director of Clean Water for North Carolina.

“Given the record of deception and failure to take any proactive measures or even come into minimal compliance, I called for a shutting down of operations,” said Taylor. “PFAS are accumulating in the environment and in people’s and animals’ bodies, and exposure will continue even after a shutdown of production—there is simply no excuse for allowing continued production of these substances, especially by this company.”

This April, the NCDEQ released a statement that said that the company’s response was “clearly deficient.”

In the announcement, NCDEQ announced they were requiring Chemours to make changes to its Corrective Action Plan. Department officials said that the company’s plan “lacks a thorough technical basis.”

Then, in May a federal grand jury declined to bring Clean Water Act charges against Chemours.

NCAG launches investigation

According to the statement, the AG’s office is expanding his investigation to find out the extent of PFAS contamination. In addition, it says his office will examine contamination in “the surface waters, soils, and groundwater of North Carolina.”

As part of the investigation, the NCDOJ has requested thousands of pages of documents from the Delaware-based company. In addition, the department set a deadline of 10 a.m. on August 21, at 10 a.m. for Chemours to provide the documents.

“I’m not able to get into specifics of the investigation and how it might play out,” said Laura Brewer, Communications Director for the Attorney General.

“I can tell you we are looking at PFAS in our drinking water and determining whether there are any further appropriate actions to hold accountable those responsible for damaging our State’s natural resources.”

What it means for North Carolina residents

North Carolina residents have reasons to be concerned about their drinking water. While legal action has focused on areas south of Fayetteville on the Cape Fear River, but contamination problems are widespread.

Studies also found high levels of PFAS in the Haw River near Pittsboro. In addition, GenX is currently still unregulated. The lack of national or state standards makes it difficult for any laws to be enforced.

However, EPA scientists have made progress on removing PFAS from drinking water. According to its website, people can use these technologies in individual homes or at scale in water treatment facilities.

The EPA offers many resources on its website, including several tools to check water quality reports and look for violations. Your local government's website should have links to its own water quality reports.

Summer is now in full swing, and although some of the events we've looked forward to may be canceled, car...

Whether you're looking for vintage second-hand items or fresh designs right off the rack, there is a multitude of businesses to purchase your wardrobe from in North Carolina. We've gathered a list of 25 Black-owned businesses where you can find your clothing and accessories while supporting the African American community.

The recovery of the economy is at the front of everyone's mind. Third-quarter unemployment numbers for North Carolina so far show reasons to be positive, but also to worry.