Information Sheet on Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) Environmental Testing At NASA's Wallops Flight Facility

Current as of May 10, 2017

This update is part of NASA Wallops' ongoing communication regarding testing for Per- and Polyfluroalkyl substances.

Background

NASA, in collaboration with local, state, and federal agencies, has been conducting testing of the facility's groundwater monitoring and drinking water wells and the Town of Chincoteague's drinking water wells for the presence of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). These tests were done because of historic activities at a former firefighter training area located on the north-central side of the Wallops mainbase. Firefighters conducted training with a commonly-used firefighting foam that contains PFAS compounds.

What We Have Done and What We Know

All tests results of the Wallops drinking water and Town of Chincoteague's drinking water show that the water is safe to drink. These tests were done using an independent laboratory for analysis and reviewed by state and federal health agencies.

The Town of Chincoteague has seven wells, three shallow and four deep, on Wallops' property to produce drinking water. Initial tests from sampling the Town of Chincoteague's wells in April showed PFAS at a level above the EPA's Lifetime Health Advisory in two of three shallow wells and in an adjacent deep water well. Results showed PFAS in the Town of Chincoteague's third shallow well, but at a level below the Lifetime Health Advisory. According to the EPA, the Lifetime Health Advisory is set to be protective of all individuals, including the most sensitive populations. The other wells (three deep water wells) did not have any detections of PFAS.

The Town of Chincoteague is not using its shallow wells to produce finished drinking water for the town and has stopped using the adjacent deep water well. NASA has conducted additional testing of the Town of Chincoteague's drinking water wells and finished water. The latest tests of the three deep water wells providing drinking water to the Town of Chincoteague and of the Town's finished drinking water show no detections of PFAS. In addition, test results of Wallops' deep water drinking wells and drinking water did not detect PFAS.

In addition to the sampling of water wells and drinking water, NASA has also conducted sampling of the shallow groundwater on the west side of the facility across Mosquito Creek away from the known area where the firefighting foam had been used. Test results did not detect PFAS. Test results of the shallow groundwater on the south side of the facility also did not detect PFAS. These results help to define the extent of which PFAS is located in Wallops' shallow groundwater.

What Else is NASA Doing

NASA will continue to monitor drinking water supplies. Additionally, NASA will install monitoring wells (not for drinking water) to conduct ongoing observation of the shallow groundwater along the west and south perimeter of the facility to ensure a full understanding of the groundwater quality at those locations.

NASA will continue to share all sampling results and will continue to communicate with local officials, EPA, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (VDEQ) and the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) to discuss results and develop any additional actions and provide information to the public including on our website and in fact sheets.

For Wallops' updates on PFAS Testing, see:
https://www.nasa.gov/content/information-on-wallops-pfas-testing

Background on PFAS

PFAS are manmade compounds used extensively in a wide variety of consumer products and are also related to the use of a firefighting foam. At a former firefighter training area located on the north-central side of the Wallops mainbase, firefighters conducted training with a commonly-used firefighting foam that contains PFAS compounds.

The Environmental Protection Agency has not established drinking water standards for PFAS. While not regulated, the EPA has been increasingly sampling for PFAS. Since 2013, the EPA has detected PFAS in numerous public water supplies serving 16 million people across 33 states. In May 2016, the EPA issued updated lifetime Health Advisory (HA) level guidelines for two PFAS compounds, perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA).

More on the EPA's HA here: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2016-06/documents/drinkingwaterhealthadvisories_pfoa_pfos_updated_5.31.16.pdf.

For more information on PFAS, see:
https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfc/docs/pfas_fact_sheet.pdf

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