



Frequently Asked Questions about the MassDEP Private Wells PFAS Sampling Program

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Introduction

This fact sheet provides answers to questions about Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)'s free sampling and analysis program for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in private drinking water wells. The [MassDEP Fact Sheet - PFAS in Drinking Water: Questions and Answers for Consumers](#) describes the sources of PFAS compounds, health effects, and MassDEP recommendations to reduce consumer exposure. The [Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances \(PFAS\) in Private Well Drinking Water Supplies FAQ](#) describes what private well owners need to know about the possibility of PFAS in well water.

1. What are PFAS and why are they a concern?

PFAS are a group of man-made chemicals used in a variety of consumer products and industries throughout the world. PFAS have been used in some firefighting foams, a number of industrial processes, and to make materials that are resistant to water, grease and stains for use in carpets, clothing, fabrics for furniture, paper packaging for food, cookware, leather goods, ski waxes, and more. Because these chemicals have been used in many consumer products over the past 50 years, most people have been exposed to them.

PFAS have been found to seep into surface soils, groundwater and surface water, and thereby contaminate drinking water. PFAS exposures have been linked to a variety of health risks, particularly in people who are immune-compromised, women who are pregnant or nursing, and in infants. On October 2, 2020, MassDEP published its PFAS public drinking water standard of 20 nanograms per liter (ng/L) (or parts per trillion [ppt]) – individually or for the sum of the concentrations of six specific PFAS compounds: perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS); perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA); perfluorohexane sulfonic acid (PFHxS); perfluorononanoic acid (PFNA); perfluoroheptanoic acid (PFHpA); and perfluorodecanoic acid (PFDA). MassDEP abbreviates this set of six PFAS substances as “PFAS6.” This drinking water standard was established by MassDEP to be protective against adverse health effects for all people consuming the water. For information on the PFAS6 drinking water standard see: [310 CMR 22.00: The Massachusetts Drinking Water Regulations](#).

2. What are some of the reasons I might test my private well for PFAS?

If your well is located near potential sources of PFAS or near other water supplies where PFAS has been detected, you may consider sampling your well water. Potential sources of PFAS in groundwater may include airfields where firefighting foams were used, firefighting training areas, certain manufacturing facilities, and some waste disposal sites. Because PFAS have been widely used in consumer products, septic systems and landfills may also be sources of PFAS in groundwater. You may wish to sample your well even without knowledge of specific potential sources of PFAS contamination, because many potential sources of PFAS have yet to be identified.

This information is available in alternate format. Contact Michelle Waters-Ekanem, Director of Diversity/Civil Rights at 617-292-5751.

TTY# MassRelay Service 1-800-439-2370

MassDEP Website: www.mass.gov/dep

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3. What is the MassDEP Private Wells PFAS Sampling Program?

MassDEP will be conducting PFAS testing for a limited number of private wells, focusing on the 84 Massachusetts towns where 60% or more of residents are served by private wells. Private wells are regulated by local Boards of Health, which are overseen by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. MassDEP will work with these entities, other local partners, and MassDEP’s contractor, the University of Massachusetts (UMass), to select and provide for free sampling of selected private wells. An estimated 40 wells will be selected within each of the 84 towns based on priorities including geographic distribution throughout the town, proximity to potential sources of PFAS, and available funding. Should fewer than 20 of the selected well owners opt to participate in the program, other private well owners will be invited to apply and will be selected on a first-come, first-served basis. The 84 Massachusetts towns in which 60% or more of residents are served by private wells are:

ALFORD	DOVER	MONTGOMERY	ROYALSTON
AQUINNAH	DUNSTABLE	MOUNT WASHINGTON	SANDISFIELD
ASHBY	ERVING	NANTUCKET*	SAVOY
ASHFIELD	FLORIDA	NEW ASHFORD	SHELBURNE
BECKET	FREETOWN	NEW BRAINTREE	SHERBORN
BELCHERTOWN	GOSHEN	NEW MARLBOROUGH	SHUTESBURY
BERKLEY	GRANBY	NEW SALEM	STOW
BERLIN	GRANVILLE	NEWBURY	SUTTON
BOLTON	HAMPDEN	OAKHAM	TOLLAND
BOXBOROUGH*	HARVARD	OTIS	TRURO
BOXFORD	HAWLEY	PELHAM	TYNGSBOROUGH
BRIMFIELD	HEATH	PERU	TYRINGHAM
BUCKLAND	HOLLAND	PETERSHAM	WALES
CARLISLE	HUBBARDSTON	PHILLIPSTON	WARWICK
CARVER	LAKEVILLE	PLAINFIELD	WASHINGTON
CHARLEMONT	LEVERETT	PLYMPTON	WELLFLEET*
CHARLTON	LEYDEN	PRINCETON	WENDELL
CHESTERFIELD	MENDON	REHOBOTH	WEST TISBURY
CLARKSBURG	MIDDLEFIELD	RICHMOND	WESTHAMPTON
COLRAIN	MILLVILLE	ROCHESTER	WESTPORT
CONWAY	MONTEREY	ROWE	WINDSOR

*Towns added based on summer population and population updates

4. If a well is not selected for the program, are there other resources available?

MassDEP will provide technical assistance information on PFAS for all private well owners as part of its private well guidance and outreach program that will engage Boards of Health and other local partners. There are many resources already available for private well owners listed below, and the UMass Technical

Assistance Providers are available to answer questions at pfas-pwo@umass.edu. The Rural Community Assistance Program (RCAP) is also available to provide technical assistance to private well owners. Contact RCAP at <https://www.rcapsolutions.org/contact/>.

5. How does a private well owner sign up for PFAS sampling?

If a private well owner receives an invitation for the program, they visit <https://dwp-pfas.madwpdep.org/> to apply. Once a homeowner has applied and been selected, they will be contacted by MassDEP's UMass contractor by email or other appropriate methods, asking them to confirm their contact information. UMass will respond within two weeks of receipt of a confirmed email address.

6. Who collects the water samples for the MassDEP Private Wells PFAS Sampling Program?

The private well owner will be responsible for collecting the water samples, so there is no requirement to provide access to your home. MassDEP UMass contractors and the labs will provide clear, simple instructions to the private well owners on how to collect samples. A training video available at <https://youtu.be/OgCtjLBVKYo> demonstrates how to collect drinking water samples for PFAS. MassDEP UMass contractors are also available at pfas-pwo@umass.edu to guide you through sample collection and to answer any questions.

7. How does the selected private well owner get the water sample bottles for PFAS sampling?

Once the private well owner has been accepted for free PFAS lab analyses:

- 1) The MassDEP Drinking Water Program or the UMass contractor will contact the private well owner to verify their information, including mailing address, and arrange for a sample collection timeframe.
- 2) The MassDEP Contracted Laboratory will send a sampling kit to the private well owner containing instructions, a Chain-of-Custody form, and sample bottles. Return postage will be included.

Note: MassDEP has contracted with five labs to provide the free analysis for PFAS. Your contacts for any questions regarding the status of your free PFAS sampling will be:

- The UMass contractor Technical Assistance Providers at pfas-pwo@umass.edu.
- The MassDEP Drinking Water Program at program.director-dwp@mass.gov using the subject "Private Well PFAS Sampling Program."

8. How are the selected private well owners informed of the PFAS water sampling results?

After performing a quality control check and accepting the PFAS laboratory testing results, the UMass contractor will email a copy of the lab report to the private well owner with a cover letter including recommended actions, if needed. The local board of health and MassDEP will be copied on the email. The private well owner may contact the MassDEP/UMass Contractor at pfas-pwo@umass.edu with any questions regarding the lab report.

9. Will MassDEP collect any additional samples after the initial samples?

If the lab results of the first sample indicate that any of the six PFAS are detected in the water, MassDEP may request that the well owner collect one or more additional samples to confirm the result and to help identify any potential sources of PFAS contamination. The confirmatory samples are part of the free analyses; the well owner will be contacted and provided with a confirmation sampling kit.

10. What will happen if PFAS is confirmed to be present in a private well?

The owner of a private well is generally responsible for ensuring the quality of the drinking water. MassDEP and its UMass contractor can provide technical assistance on ways to reduce exposure to PFAS in drinking water, including the use of bottled water and installation of treatment systems.

11. What will happen if PFAS in the well water is confirmed at an elevated level?

MassDEP and the UMass contractor provide technical assistance on any recommended steps to take based on the PFAS results. Detection of PFAS6 above 20 ppt in a Private Well may have legal and financial implications for its owner. *Each owner will be notified of this in advance of participating and acknowledge this on their signup form.* A PFAS6 result of 20 ppt or above is a reportable concentration under Massachusetts Regulation 310 CMR 40.0000, the [Massachusetts Contingency Plan](#). The MassDEP Bureau of Waste Site Cleanup (BWSC) will receive copies of all private well PFAS lab results for waste site notification and cleanup requirements. MassDEP BWSC will follow-up with the well owner to ensure that private wells with detections higher than 90 ppt (i.e., Imminent Hazards under the regulations) are addressed in a timely manner. The [PFAS Private Wells Sampling Program 21E Q&A](#) provides information on MassDEP BWSC possible action, depending on the level of PFAS detected in the well (< 20 ppt, from 20 to 90 ppt, or > 90 ppt).

12. What are the potential costs if a private well owner's property is found to be the source PFAS contamination?

To date, MassDEP's experience has been that private wells (residential locations) are generally affected by off-property, non-residential sources (e.g., nearby fire training locations, industry, etc.). Therefore, they are categorized with downgradient property status, or DPS. The extent to which MassDEP will bill for work it performs depends on whether or not the PFAS6 migrated to your property from somewhere else. A DPS property owner will not be billed.

When considering whether your home could be the actual source of PFAS contamination, you should think about the past use(s) of the property over the past 20–50 years and whether any of those uses on that property may have involved PFAS. The potential costs would be very case-specific. If your property is determined to be the source of contamination, even a simple example would require that a Licensed Site Professional be hired to oversee sampling of groundwater (and likely soil) and make the required submittals to MassDEP. If the contamination is found to be widespread – affecting other homes in the neighborhood, not just yours – substantially more sampling would be required and could include the installation of treatment systems in multiple homes. Thus, the potential costs could range from tens-of-thousands of dollars (for a relatively simple site) up to hundreds of thousands, or more.

13. Will the laboratory results of the PFAS testing of selected private wells be made public?

Lab results of all PFAS tests will be provided to the private well owner and MassDEP. In addition, a copy of all results will be provided to the appropriate local board of health. Individual private well owner results will not be automatically provided to the public. Anonymized results with no individual owner information will be used by MassDEP to develop PFAS characterization maps. However, records of laboratory results of PFAS testing are considered public documents and therefore may be made publicly available as per the Massachusetts Public Records Law.

14. Are public water supplies also testing for PFAS?

Yes, under the recently revised MassDEP regulations all public water supplies must test for PFAS. The Baker-Polito Administration secured funding in two supplemental budgets adopted by the Massachusetts Legislature to provide free PFAS analyses for both private wells and public water supplies across the Commonwealth. Information on the free PFAS lab analyses program for public water systems is available in the links below. The information collected from both selected private wells and public water supplies will be used to characterize PFAS levels in the groundwater and surface water of the Commonwealth and inform MassDEP's strategy for treatment and mitigation of this emerging contaminant.

15. Who can I contact for information or technical assistance on free PFAS samples?

Send an email with your questions to pfas-pwo@umass.edu or to Program.director-DWP@mass.gov with the Subject: "Private Wells PFAS Sampling Program."

16. What are some Town considerations?

Local Boards of Health regulate private wells and the owner of a private well is generally responsible for ensuring the quality of the drinking water and addressing any contaminants. Residents with PFAS in their private well will likely have questions for the Board of Health and other Town officials. MassDEP Drinking Water Program and its UMass contractor can provide technical assistance on ways to reduce exposure to PFAS in drinking water, including the use of bottled water and installation of treatment systems.

If a Town facility, such as a landfill or firefighter training area, is identified as a source of PFAS contamination, the Town could have obligations under the state Waste Site Cleanup Program. Required response actions under the state Waste Site Cleanup Program may include testing additional private wells in the area and the provision of bottled water/treatment systems to the affected area. For more specific information on the state Waste Site Cleanup Program, email bwsc.information@mass.gov.

17. How is Massachusetts addressing PFAS?

There are many ways Massachusetts is addressing PFAS, including, but not limited to:

- Legislature provided \$8.4M requested by Baker–Polito Administration for:
 - MassDEP, with technical assistance partners UMass Amherst and UMass Lowell, testing of public water supplies throughout Massachusetts for PFAS
 - MassDEP, with technical assistance partners UMass Amherst and UMass Lowell, testing of private wells throughout Massachusetts for PFAS
 - Grants to municipal water suppliers to address PFAS in drinking water
- \$20M to Clean Water Trust for communities to address contamination issues.
- MassDEP has established a Maximum Contaminant Limit (MCL) of 20 ppt for the sum of six PFAS compounds (PFAS6) in drinking water for public water supplies (October 2020)
- MassDEP PFAS-related site work under the Massachusetts Contingency Plan, 310 CMR 40.0000:
 - Promulgated notification criteria & cleanup standards for soil and groundwater (December 2019)
 - Published PFAS Sampling Guidance (2018, revised October 2020)

- PFAS site discovery, targeted testing, and site cleanup
- Implemented take-back program that collected more than 170,000 lbs of PFAS-containing AFFF (firefighting foam) from more than 70 public safety agencies.
- Provided technical & logistical support to MassDEP PFAS-initiatives, including access to contract labs and lab certifications
- Monitoring and testing of biota and surface water
- Evaluating biosolid residuals and developing standards
- Monitoring municipal and industrial wastewater treatment in coordination with EPA and reducing PFAS in industrial and municipal wastewater through permitting requirements
- Testing and evaluating mosquitoicides used for EEE spraying and coordinating with EPA

For more information, visit:

MassDEP PFAS Webpage: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/per-and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances-pfas>

MassDEP Factsheet on PFAS for Consumers: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/per-and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances-pfas>

MassDEP Factsheet - PFAS in Private Wells: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/per-and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances-pfas-in-private-well-drinking-water-supplies-faq>

Massachusetts Department of Public Health Factsheet on PFAS: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/per-and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances-pfas-in-drinking-water>

Be Well Informed: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/understanding-my-laboratory-results>

MassDEP Private Well webpage: <https://www.mass.gov/private-wells>

Private Wells PFAS Sampling Program 21E Questions and Answers: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/private-wells-pfas-sampling-program-21e-questions-and-answers>

THIS DOCUMENT CONTAINS IMPORTANT INFORMATION. HAVE SOMEONE TRANSLATE IT FOR YOU OR SPEAK WITH SOMEONE WHO UNDERSTANDS IT.

If you need this document translated, please contact MassDEP's Diversity Director, Michelle Waters-Ekanem, Diversity Director/Civil Rights: 617-292-5751 TTY# MassRelay Service 1-800-439-2370. You may also contact the Drinking Water Program at program.director-dwp@mass.gov .