

FOMB PFAS Report-WGME TV News 10/26/22

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New tests find forever chemicals in Midcoast watershed

by Brad Rogers, WGME

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New tests have found forever chemicals in a Midcoast Maine watershed. (WGME)

BRUNSWICK (WGME) -- New tests have found forever chemicals in a Midcoast Maine watershed.

The chemical compounds, known as "PFAS," have been increasingly linked to harmful health effects, both in people and in animals.

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The comprehensive report released by Friends of Merrymeeting Bay provides direct, first-time evidence of continued PFAS leakage from the former Brunswick Naval Air Station reaching the watershed.

"The question was, in my mind, 'What's making it to the river?'" Ed Friedman of Friends of Merrymeeting Bay said.

Friedman and others sampled 30 sites on the Androscoggin and Kennebec Rivers and several creeks that lead to Merrymeeting Bay.

He says the testing found 19 different PFAS toxins in the water.

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"PFAS is sort of the new kid on the block," Friedman said. "But we've had advisories out for mercury here statewide for many, many years."

Of the 30 sites tested, the highest levels of PFAS were found in three creeks that drain from the Brunswick Naval Air Station into the Androscoggin River. The highest level was 922 parts per trillion, well above what the EPA considers a safe level.

In fact, recent tests on the former base found two types of PFAS used in firefighting foams.

“When you have an obvious point source like the Brunswick Naval Air Station, and the firefighting foam is probably leaking out still, then you really need to address, when you know where it is, you need to address the problem and you need to address it quickly and effectively,” Friedman said.

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The testing also found high levels of PFAS in the Androscoggin River where the Brunswick Sewer District releases treated water.

“We’re not required to treat for PFAS,” Rob Pontau of the Brunswick Sewer District said. “We don’t even know what that level would be at this point.”

Pontau says he’s not surprised by the results.

He and Friedman say it’s now up to the state to do their own testing and issue an advisory on eating fish caught in these waters.

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“It’s certainly concerning,” Pontau said. “There’s no doubt. Until we know more about the appropriate levels that you can eat in fish and so forth, I mean, I’m an avid hunter. So last year when the state closed down the Fairfield area, that certainly concerned me and most of my staff.”