

Clean Lakes Alliance Position Statement on PFAS

Approved by Community Board: 3/10/2020

Clean Lakes Alliance wants our lakes to be viewed and treated as the true center of our community. The more people who share in that vision, the more we can prioritize clean, safe, healthy, and accessible lakes for all who want to use, enjoy, and benefit from them.

Clean Lakes Alliance supports actions that promote the above vision and priorities while opposing actions (or inaction) that runs counter to them. While our primary focus continues to be on reducing phosphorus pollution—the number one driver of toxic cyanobacteria blooms—we will work to draw attention to other lake challenges and opportunities as they present themselves.

What are PFAS?

PFAS (Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances, sometimes known as perfluorinated compounds, including PFOA/PFOS) are a category of approximately 5,000 human-made chemicals. They are found in a wide range of industrial and consumer products, including food packaging, non-stick products, fabric/carpet coatings, personal care products, and firefighting foams. PFAS are highly persistent, meaning they do not biodegrade. The widespread use of these chemicals has resulted in the contamination of groundwater, surface water, and soils in many parts of the United States, as well the bioaccumulation of PFAS in humans.

Why are PFAS a growing concern for the Yahara River Watershed?

While the science is still developing, current evidence demonstrates that exposure to certain PFAS may cause serious health conditions, including certain forms of cancer, impaired fertility and fetal development, high cholesterol, and pregnancy complications. In Madison, nearly half of the municipal wells were shown to have detectable levels of PFAS, and one well was closed due to PFAS contamination. In addition, high PFAS levels were found in Starkweather Creek, which discharges into Lake Monona. This contamination could be linked to high levels of PFAS being found in shallow groundwater in the area. Public Health Madison & Dane County subsequently issued warnings urging residents to limit the amount of fish consumed from Lake Monona and avoid swallowing water.

What is Clean Lakes Alliance's position on PFAS?

Clean Lakes Alliance is committed to the overall health of the Yahara River Watershed and the ability of all residents to enjoy clean lakes. PFAS are a direct threat to our community's ability to use and enjoy the lakes, and PFAS contamination disproportionately harms marginalized populations. Populations disproportionately affected include those who rely on Lake Monona fish as a regular food source, and the neighborhoods around Starkweather Creek that are home to higher numbers of people of color and lower-income families.

Therefore, Clean Lakes Alliance urges our local, state, and federal governments to take action to: 1) prevent further PFAS contamination; 2) set and update limits for PFAS that protect public health; 3) test to determine the sources and extent of contamination; and 4) clean up existing sources of PFAS contamination.

Sources:

FDA Statement on PFAS June 11, 2019

Earth Justice Factsheet on PFAS Jan. 2019

The Capital Times, "Unknown fear: Madison residents are increasingly alarmed by PFAS levels in local waterways," Steven Elbow, Dec 11, 2019