“PFAS” is short for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances. It is a group of man-made chemicals that were first invented in the 1940s. There are thousands of different types of PFAS chemicals and more are being invented all the time. They are used in industrial manufacturing, firefighting foam, and common household products. PFAS has been found to cause negative health effects on humans, including developmental, immune, endocrine, reproductive, and carcinogenic effects.

The State of Vermont has regulated PFAS in drinking water since 2019, so the Winhall-Stratton Fie District has already been testing our water for a number of years. The new regulations from EPA are different from Vermont’s regulations—stricter in some regards and less strict in others.

EPA has set Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) for five PFAS compounds: PFOA and PFOS, PFNA, PFHxS, and HFPO-DA. Under the new regulations, any water system that is found to have PFAS levels above these MCLs is required to take action to reduce PFAS levels by 2029.

In addition, EPA set a Hazard Index for a mixture of four PFAS compounds: PFNA, PFHxS, HFPO-DA, and PFBS. For more information about EPA’s new drinking water standards for PFAS, visit <https://www.epa.gov/sdwa/and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances-pfas>.

Vermont’s regulations set a cumulative MCL for five PFAS compounds: PFOA, PFOS, PFNA, PFHxS, and PFHpA. The combined total of these five compounds should not exceed 20 parts per trillion (ppt).

Most public water systems in Vermont have been required to test for PFAS since 2019, so the Winhall-Stratton Fire District already has several years of data about PFAS levels in our drinking water. In light of EPA’s new PFAS regulations, the Winhall-Stratton Fire District will review our PFAS test results to determine if additional courses of action are necessary. We will continue testing for PFAS results regularly. Test results can be found in our annual Consumer Confidence Report or by contacting us directly.

It is important to understand that PFAS chemicals are not added to drinking water. Instead, water sources like rivers, lakes, wells, and springs may become contaminated with PFAS that come from manufacturing plants or use of commercial or household products that contain PFAS.

Rather than blaming water utilities for PFAS, the industrial manufacturers that produce and profit from these chemicals should be held accountable. There are currently a number of lawsuits against PFAS manufacturers that are responsible for drinking water contamination, and the Vermont legislature is working on a bill to ban PFAS in consumer products.

Only an estimated 20 percent of a person's exposure to PFAS comes from drinking water. The rest comes from products that you likely have in your home: non-stick cookware, food packaging, cosmetics, stain/water-resistant clothing, carpet and furniture treatments, and more.

Bottled water may contain PFAS, so drinking bottled water will not necessarily help reduce a person’s exposure to PFAS. Bottled water is not usually tested for PFAS. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not currently have safety standards for PFAS in bottled water.

The State of Vermont has taken some actions to restrict the use of PFAS chemicals. Act 36 of 2021 prohibits selling, manufacturing, and/or distributing the following products if they contain intentionally added PFAS: firefighting foam; food packaging; rugs, carpets, and carpet treatments; and ski wax.

The Vermont Legislature is also currently working on a bill (S.25) that will ban the manufacture, sale, and/or distribution of the following products that contain PFAS: cosmetic or menstrual products, aftermarket stain and water-resistant treatments, cookware, incontinency protection products, baby and toddler products, rugs and carpets, ski wax, textiles, and artificial turf.

Regardless of the challenges posed by PFAS, the Winhall-Stratton Fire District is committed to providing safe, reliable drinking water. We will continue to operate as we always have, as a protector of public health that delivers high-quality drinking water to your taps.