TIMELINE OF

PFAS HISTORY AND USE IN LA CROSSE

PFAS, or perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances, are a group of "forever chemicals," meaning they do not break down over time, and are believed to have originated from firefighting foam.

1960s

AFFF Class B firefighting foam developed and put to use.

1981

First use of the foam at a fire test pit at the La Crosse Regional Airport on its northeast end. Five other points of use have been discovered at the airport and investigated since.

1995-1999

Contaminated areas at airport cleaned of remaining solvents.

2001

Plane crash at La Crosse Regional Airport, where PFAS-containing foam was used. It's the most recent known emergency use of the foam, and is the most directly linked to water contamination.

2014

PFAS first detected in Well 23 near airport. Well 24 later also tested positive, and both were subsequently shut down.

2019

Wisconsin DHS creates first set of standards for levels of PFAS; City of La Crosse hires The OS Group.

Aug. 2020

Groundwater and soil testing.

Oct. 2020

City offers free testing for French Island residents.

1930s

PFAS are invented, the main ingredient in non-stick and waterproof coatings.

1970s

Some manufacturers like 3M discover that PFAS hold toxic characteristics.

It's unclear which brand of foam was used in La Crosse dating this far back.

1990s

Burn pits at airport first tested for contaminants. PFAS not tested for, and health effects unknown.

2000

3M voluntarily phases out PFAS production, after revealing inhouse studies that showed adverse effects in employees, and EPA begins regulating substances.

2010

Solvent sites closed by DNR.

2014-2019

State and local officials monitor contaminated wells and conduct pumping study.

May 2019

DNR orders PFAS investigation.

Sept. 2020

Groundwater and soil testing results reveal risk to neighbors of airport.

Jan. 12, 2021

Results reveal that at least 40 wells have above-standard levels of PFAS and residents are given bottled water. Additional testing begins and discussions of solutions.