



Tampa Bay Water files ‘forever chemicals’ lawsuit against DuPont, 3M

The utility serves more than 2.5 million customers. A spokesperson said Tampa Bay Water has not detected dangerous levels of the chemicals in its supply but is taking an ‘initial step’ amid evolving science.

May 20, 2020 | Zachary T. Sampson | Environmental Reporter

Tampa Bay Water, the regional supplier of drinking water for more than 2.5 million people, is suing chemical companies including DuPont and 3M over environmental contamination from flame retardants, according to court records.

The utility’s filing May 14 places it among a growing number of organizations calling for damages from the corporations for the release of “forever chemicals” — certain per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, which studies show may hurt human health. The case references pollution from a particular type of foam used to fight fires, which has been connected to training sites, military bases and airports. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection lists MacDill Air Force Base as one place with a confirmed presence of at least one contaminant. Flame-retardant foam has also been tied to tainted wells near the Florida State Fire College in Ocala.

Tampa Bay Water has not detected dangerous levels of the chemicals in its supply, said spokesman Brandon Moore. But as researchers study the compounds further, he called the lawsuit, which seeks monetary damages, “an initial step to protect Tampa Bay Water’s interests.” The utility supplies water for Pinellas, Hillsborough and Pasco counties, along with the cities of Tampa, St. Petersburg and New Port Richey. It is especially dependent on groundwater.

Science around the harmful effects of the chemicals and safe concentration levels for drinking is evolving, but the Environmental Protection Agency has set the current limit at 70 parts per trillion.

Filed in federal court in South Carolina, where a judge is handling a batch of similar lawsuits, the complaint features broad language alleging companies including DuPont, 3M and their subsidiaries were negligent. The compounds are ubiquitous, found in products such as nonstick pans, cleaning supplies and packaging, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. Research shows they might accumulate, affecting hormones and spiking cholesterol, and potentially worsening the risk for certain cancers.

“Motivated by billions of dollars in profits, the DuPont Defendants and 3M have intentionally withheld, suppressed, minimalized, diminished, marginalized, misrepresented, and obfuscated factual information in their possession regarding the toxic effects of PFASs on the environment, animal health, aquatic life and human health,” lawyers wrote.

Tampa Bay Water, according to the complaint, wants the makers to pay for future costs of tasks like monitoring and removing the compounds from the water supply. A spokesperson for 3M wrote in an email that the company “acted responsibly in connection with its manufacture and sale of AFFF (aqueous film-forming foam) and will vigorously defend its record of environmental stewardship.”

A DuPont spokesperson did not respond to an email or call seeking comment.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection lists a few locations around the state as having had trouble with the contaminants in the public water supply. They include two wells in Escambia County, near Pensacola International Airport; three in Stuart; and one in Zephyrhills, which has been shut down.

[ORIGINAL ARTICLE](#)