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EMBARGOED: State urges company to stop additional chemical discharges into the Cape Fear River
DEQ again demands Chemours provide complete list of chemicals in company's waste stream

RALEIGH – As part of its ongoing investigation, the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality this week urged Chemours to stop discharging two additional chemical compounds into the Cape Fear River. The compounds were identified in the company's waste stream by a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency preliminary analysis shared with the state this week.

At a meeting on Monday, EPA scientists told the state they have identified two compounds they are calling Nafion byproducts 1 and 2 in Chemours' waste stream and that estimated concentrations of these compounds are not decreasing. The new information prompted DEQ to [write Chemours](#) on Tuesday urging the company to stop the release of the two compounds. DEQ also repeated its demand for Chemours to provide the state agency with a complete inventory, sampling data and test results for all chemicals included in the company's waste stream.

"Our top priority is to protect the state's citizens," said Michael Regan, secretary of the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality. "Until we know more about the health effects of these byproducts, the company needs to stop discharging them. We're also repeating our demand that Chemours give us information about all other chemicals in its waste stream."

The new information is the result of the EPA's analysis of water samples submitted by DEQ to the EPA's lab in Research Triangle Park. Information about the presence of the Nafion byproducts comes from preliminary analysis of water samples gathered by DEQ at Chemours' wastewater discharge outfall near Fayetteville and finished drinking water at the Sweeney Water Treatment Plant in Wilmington. Scientists at the EPA lab are conducting further analysis of the water samples.

Preliminary results shared by the EPA this week also include three perfluorinated compounds that along with GenX were previously identified in the Cape Fear River by a 2016 study by the EPA and N.C. State University. Estimated concentrations of these three perfluorinated compounds dropped significantly, similar to GenX levels after the company stopped discharging GenX. For that reason, state and federal officials believe the three perfluorinated compounds were part of the same wastewater discharge that included GenX and was stopped.

The accuracy of the laboratory analysis for the five chemicals included in the EPA's preliminary results is more uncertain than those available for GenX because calibration standards for these chemicals are not commercially available. EPA is using new non-targeted screening methods to develop concentration estimates for these five chemicals. With non-targeted screening, researchers are able to test for and identify chemicals present, rather than testing to see if a particular chemical is present. This is different from the more commonly known targeted screening, which is when researchers identify what they are looking for in the water and then test for those specific things.

State officials began investigating the presence of GenX in the river in June. That ongoing investigation along with pressure from residents and local officials prompted Chemours to stop discharging GenX from its Fayetteville facility. DEQ is now asking Chemours to stop discharge of the Nafion byproducts, which preliminary results indicate come from the company's wastewater but are unchanged since the GenX discharge ended.

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Little is known about the health effects of any of the five compounds—Nafion byproducts 1 and 2 or the three other perfluorinated compounds – included in this week’s analysis from the EPA.

Public health experts with DHHS used available studies to establish a health goal for GenX. Since the GenX discharge stopped, concentrations of GenX have dropped well below the state health goal of 140 parts per trillion. No similar health studies have been identified for the Nafion byproducts or the other three perfluorinated compounds analyzed by the EPA, so DHHS is unable to establish a health goal for them at this time.

DHHS reiterated its health guidance that the public can continue to drink the water, based on ongoing testing for GenX and other compounds for which health information is available. This guidance has not changed following the preliminary results shared by the EPA this week.

“I know how frustrating it is to all of us that we have very little scientific information about these unregulated, emerging compounds,” said Mandy Cohen, secretary of the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services. “We continue to work with the Environmental Protection Agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other scientists to get more information as quickly as possible.”

As part of the ongoing investigation, DEQ requested that the EPA analyze water samples for GenX and other unregulated chemical compounds included in the 2016 study conducted by the EPA and N.C. State University. Among those chemicals are the perfluorinated compounds the EPA reported this week. The EPA also chose to analyze the water samples for the Nafion byproducts based on a separate prior study by the federal agency. Specialists with the EPA’s lab in Research Triangle Park conducted the analysis using new technology and methodology and looked at water samples collected by DEQ over a six-week period starting June 19.

DEQ will review all this information as part of its investigation and the agency’s review of Chemours’ application for a new wastewater discharge permit.

The EPA informed state officials this week that it is working on a report that will include concentrations of other compounds at multiple sampling locations over multiple weeks.

As with the results for GenX, DEQ will make public test results for all the compounds when final data is available.

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