The Road to PFAS Messaging

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Learning From the Past

- BPA phase-out has taught us a long, deliberately confusing road lies ahead with industry
  - www.ewg.org/research/timeline-bpa-invention-phase-out
- When private sector businesses are financially threatened, things get messy (pharmaceutical collection)
- Proper wipes labeling highlighted pairing large-scale communication campaigns as key to success
What We Know To Be True

• All water speaking with one voice is critical to success
• Message themes must cross all services: wastewater/water/recycled water
• This will be a marathon, not a sprint, marked by building customer awareness over time
• Fear cannot determine how we communicate
• Time is of the essence
• If not done correctly, our customers will blame us
Communication Concerns

- Complexity and ambiguity of PFAS
- Remember to start with the basics: PFAS = bad
- Educate and Empower vs. Overwhelm and Shutdown
- Point the blame at the causes
- Call customers to action
- Position water as the activists for change, scientific analysts, environmental protectors, and customer advocates
Messages That Resonate

Consumer Empowerment

• Education on PFAS
• Letters to companies asking if their products contain PFAS
• Updates on legislation and agency advocacy

Producer Responsibility

• “You made the mess, you clean it up”
• First they poisoned you, now they want YOU to pay to clean it up
CASA Communications Messages

• What are PFAS?
• Why should we care about PFAS?
• How does PFAS get into wastewater?
• What can WE do to reduce PFAS?
• What is California doing?
• Why AB 2247 is so important?
Marathon vs a Sprint
Marathon vs a Sprint

WHAT ARE PFAS?

Per- and polyfluoroalcohol substances (PFAS) are known as “forever chemicals” because they are highly resistant to break down in the environment and are abundant in many consumer goods. PFAS have found their way into many common household products such as nonstick cookware, furniture, clothing, carpets, cosmetics, and food packaging. Although the U.S. has banned some types of PFAS, there are still over 5,000 types in use.

PFAS contain some of the strongest chemical bonds known to science. Because of their durability, they can travel long distances and persist in the environment for decades. Scientists have found them in human breastmilk and in the tissues of the earth's largest animals like whales in the Arctic to the dust in our homes. Unfortunately, once PFAS enter the environment, there is no known way to eliminate them.

NEW STUDY LOOKS AT SOURCES OF PFAS IN WASTEWATER

Last year, Central San’s laboratory collected samples from its affluent, eastern, and downtown areas as part of a regional study to better understand how PFAS move through the collection system. Coordinated by San Francisco Luxury Island (SFLI), these research efforts will inform the state and regional water boards about the current levels, sources, and potential pathways for managing PFAS in California’s waters.

Phase 1, which included 18 Bay Area treatment facilities, found that PFAS concentrations did not contribute to the percentage of industry within the service area, suggesting that residential and industrial use were the primary contributors of PFAS. Phase 2 was designed to gather more information on these sources.

For this phase, our Environmental Compliance team collected samples at six locations in our collection system, including two single-family residential neighborhoods, a downtown residential neighborhood, two hospitals, and an industrial facility. They used a standardized protocol to collect samples every 15 minutes over 24 hours.

Collecting the samples posed an unusual challenge. To avoid contaminating the samples, the inspectors had to wear specific clothing (and couldn’t use any deodorant or personal care products) and were provided with personal protective equipment (PPE). As Senior Environmental Compliance Inspector Colleen Henry notes, “If it事宜, we couldn’t wear shoes, we just got wet. It really highlights how PFAS are in so many products.”

The samples were sent to a specialized lab for analysis. After 3D3 completes the data, they’ll share results with Central San and other Bay Area Clean Water Agencies (BACWA) participants in the study, as well as the state and regional boards. We expect results in about six months.

“The goal is to learn as much as we can about the contaminating sources of PFAS,” says Bay Area Clean Water Agencies’ Environmental Compliance Inspector Jeremy Valdez. “From there, we can determine how to move forward. This study will help inform future research as well as potential regulatory or management actions.”

Unfortunately, there are unlikely to be easy answers. If indeed residential/hares are one of the primary sources of PFAS in our wastewater, that makes it much harder to develop the kind of targeted solutions that have proved highly effective for PFAS in the environment. The best thing we can do is to keep moving points to mercury in our samples. “Through our work with the industry, we have been able to significantly reduce the amount of mercury entering our system,” he says. “When it comes to residential homes, however, we have a bit less ability to control what goes down the drain.”

While there’s still much we don’t know about PFAS, one thing that’s certain is that the best solution to PFAS pollution is upstream from our customers, through better regulations on manufacturers that sell PFAS-containing products. “The focus really needs to be, how do we keep it out of the wastewater stream to begin with?” says Environmental & Regulatory Compliance Division Manager Lori Scherl. “That’s where legislation is so important.”

Special Sections: Tackling the Challenge of PFAS

PFAS LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

The bill titled “PFAS Protocol” is on the move, by passing out of the environment to begin with. This bill would create a public database and require manufacturers to register any PFAS containing chemicals. Additionally, it would require regulators to better inform consumers about these pollutants. The bill is currently at a hearing this year and enacting new bans on PFAS in paint, food packaging, and a few other products. Two additional bills are currently making their way through Sacramento.

AB 1087 (Gray) would prohibit the sale or distribution of textile articles containing PFAS and require additional labeling of these products. This would help limit consumer exposure to PFAS from clothing, upholstery, and similar products. As well as reduce the water contamination that can occur when these products are washed.

AB 587 (Gray-Davis) would prohibit the sale or distribution of textile articles containing PFAS and requiring manufacturers to reduce the amount of PFAS alternatives. This would help limit consumer exposure to PFAS from clothing, upholstery, and similar products. As well as reduce the water contamination that can occur when these products are washed.
What the Future Holds

• CASA messaging on PFAS
• Educating all water employees
• Launching widespread education of customers
• Building a statewide customer education campaign
• Using statistical analysis
• Anticipate industry pushback, scare tactics, and creating deliberate confusion