

Addendum Relating to Stocked Trout

BRADFORD DYEING ASSOCIATION HEALTH CONSULTATION:
PFAS IN FISH TISSUE

WESTERLY, WASHINGTON COUNTY, RHODE ISLAND

**Prepared by the
Rhode Island Department of Health**

April 1, 2025

Addendum:

On December 16, 2024, the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) published a report on contamination from Bradford Dyeing Association and its potential impact on health.¹ Bradford Dyeing Association was a textile mill that released per- and polyfluorinated alkyl substances (PFAS) into the Pawcatuck River and the Grills Preserve Pond. People can be exposed to PFAS by eating fish that have been contaminated. The report by RIDOH quantifies the health risks posed by eating fish that had been contaminated with PFAS near Bradford Dyeing Association.²

During the process of engaging with the public about Bradford Dyeing Association, RIDOH learned that people were concerned about whether stocked trout could take up PFAS to levels of concern. RIDOH assessed the currently available scientific literature and found that PFAS are taken up into fish quickly. The available studies have examined PFAS uptake in a variety of fish species exposed to PFAS at higher concentrations compared to those in the Pawcatuck River. These studies show that uptake of PFAS into fish occurs quickly, with PFOS levels reaching levels that some states would consider “Do Not Eat” within 21-28 days of exposure.³⁻⁵ The literature shows that the concentrations of PFOA⁶⁻⁸, PFHpA⁷, PFBS^{7,8}, and linear PFOS⁹ tend to stabilize in fish tissue within 28 days of exposure.⁶⁻¹⁰ Based on the available science, RIDOH made a conservative recommendation to limit the consumption of stocked trout to 1 meal per month. This recommendation was made using the information in the scientific literature, which is not reflective of conditions in the Pawcatuck River. RIDOH does not have data that shows the concentration of PFAS in stocked trout in the Pawcatuck River.

Stocked trout are an important source of high-quality protein for many families and fishing is an important cultural tradition. Fish also contain high-quality protein and omega-3 fatty acids, which have numerous long-term health benefits: decreased risk of stroke, decreased rates of coronary heart disease, and improved fetal neurodevelopment during pregnancy.¹¹⁻¹³ In light of these significant benefits, RIDOH worked closely with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) to allow as much fishing as possible in the Pawcatuck River. In response to RIDOH’s concerns, RIDEM adjusted the stocking schedule for the Pawcatuck River. They are now stocking the river with trout 2 days before Opening Day (the second Saturday in April). This limits the amount of time that the trout spend in the Pawcatuck River and lowers the potential uptake of PFAS. Limiting time spent in the river will lower PFAS uptake and balances the risk of PFAS consumption with the health benefits of fish. Thanks to RIDEM’s efforts, RIDOH is publishing this Addendum to remove their advisory for stocked trout.

People fishing for stocked trout should know that fish take up PFAS from their environment. Even with this new stocking date, we do not know how much PFAS stocked trout take up in the Pawcatuck River. RIDOH and RIDEM are actively working to understand PFAS uptake in stocked trout in Rhode Island. The studies that are currently available tend to expose fish to higher concentrations of PFAS compared to what is typically seen in the Pawcatuck River. Higher exposure concentrations can lead to an increase in the rate of PFAS uptake.¹⁰ This is a significant limitation in the currently available literature. RIDOH/RIDEM have planned a study that would address that limitation and are actively seeking funding for it.

Overall, RIDOH believes that RIDEM's adjustment to the trout stocking schedule balances the risk of PFAS consumption with the benefits of fish. Our recommendations relating to fish have been updated (as of April 1, 2025) and are:

- Do not eat any fish caught from the Grills Preserve Pond.
- Eat no more than 1 meal per month of native fish (i.e., perch, bass, and pickerel) caught from the Pawcatuck River downstream of Burdickville Road in Hopkinton.
- Since PFAS tend to accumulate more in organs compared to muscle tissue, do not eat the organs of fish caught from the Pawcatuck River downstream of Burdickville Road in Hopkinton.
- RIDOH does not have the data needed to make a health-based recommendation on the safety of consuming stocked trout in this section of the Pawcatuck River. Individuals concerned about PFAS should know that these species can accumulate PFAS. People can be exposed to PFAS from a variety of sources and can lower their intake from one or more sources by limiting or replacing them.

REPORT PREPARATION

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