Site Health Risks Summary and Recommendations

Fish is Good, PFAS is Bad: Rhode Islanders need to limit the amount of native fish eaten from parts of the Pawcatuck River

Site:

Bradford Dyeing Association, Westerly, Rhode Island

Contaminant of concern:

Per and polyfluorinated alkyl substances (PFAS) in fish

Goal:

To determine if PFAS in fish could harm the health of people who eat the fish around Bradford Dyeing Association

Findings:

- Native fish (i.e., perch, bass, and pickerel) in the Grills Preserve Pond at Bradford Dyeing Association and parts of the Pawcatuck River have high levels of PFAS.
- Eating native fish caught in the Grills Preserve Pond could increase your risk of PFAS-related health effects.
- Eating native fish more than once per month from the Pawcatuck River downstream of Burdickville Road in could increase your risk of health effects.

Recommendations to Protect Your Health:

- You should not eat fish in the Grills Preserve Pond.
- You can eat native fish from the Pawcatuck River downstream of Burdickville Road once per month.
- There is not a recommendation about eating fish from other parts of the Pawcatuck River.
- You should not eat organs from fish collected from the Pawcatuck River and Grills Preserve Pond.

RIDOH does not currently 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.

Recommendations for Government Partners:

- The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) recommends that the Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) investigate sources of PFAS upstream of Bradford Dyeing Association that are contaminating fish tissues.
- RIDOH recommends RIDEM, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and RIDOH should coordinate testing of stocked trout for PFAS to assess potential health risks from eating the fish. This testing and analysis would determine how much PFAS builds up in the trout after release.
- RIDOH recommends that RIDEM sample fish from the Pawcatuck River upstream of Burdickville Road.

RIDOH Will:

- Provide a copy of the Health Consultation to community partners.
- Provide materials on the fish advisory for the Pawcatuck River.
- Continue to keep community members informed of any new findings.
- Evaluate new data as it becomes available.
- Continue to evaluate the best available science regarding risks associated with PFAS exposure and health-related outcomes.

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About PFAS

Per and polyfluorinated alkyl substances (PFAS) are a class of man-made chemicals that repel oil and water. These chemicals have been used since the 1940s to make products that are water, grease, and stain-resistant. PFAS are often called “forever chemicals” because they take a long time to degrade in the environment. They have been linked to a wide variety of health effects, such as higher cholesterol, lower infant birth weights, weakened immune response, and increased risk of some cancers. Learn more about PFAS at health.ri.gov/pfas.

Potential Health Effects of PFAS

PFAS have been linked to a variety of health effects. In adults, PFAS can increase cholesterol, suppress the immune system, damage the liver, cause problems with thyroid hormones, and increase the risk of some cancers. In infants and children, PFAS can disrupt immune system development and cause issues with growth and metabolism. During pregnancy, PFAS can increase blood pressure and reduce growth and development of an unborn child. For more information about the health risks of PFAS, please see visit health.ri.gov/pfas.

While PFAS is not good for your health, fish is a very healthy food. Fish is a source of essential nutrients. The benefits of eating fish include decreased risk of stroke, decreased rate of coronary heart disease, and improved development of children during pregnancy. People should weigh the benefits of eating fish against the potential risks from contamination.

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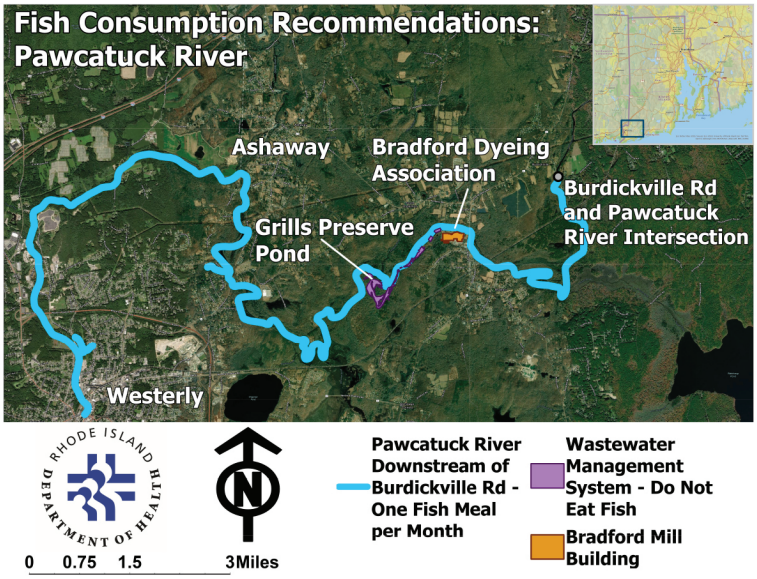
Evaluation Area:

Bradford Dyeing Association is located on the Pawcatuck River in Bradford, Rhode Island. This site is a former mill complex that used PFAS to make fabrics waterproof.

Bradford Dyeing Association is adjacent to the Grills Nature Preserve. Below is a map that shows the Bradford Dyeing Association and impacted part of the Pawcatuck River. The former wastewater treatment system is highlighted in purple and is labeled as "Grills Preserve Pond." Fish from this area should not be eaten.



About the Evaluation:

RIDEM, EPA, and Roger Williams University collected fish near Bradford Dyeing Association on the Pawcatuck River. The fish were tested for PFAS. RIDOH used the test results to understand if PFAS in these fish could have on a negative impact health. The results were published in a health consultation, which is a technical document that explains the analysis.

To read the full Health Consultation, visit health.ri.gov/ehrap. If you have questions or concerns, call **401-222-7746**.