



# **Is My Water Safe to Drink? PFAS, Emerging Contaminants, and Related Issues**

***Water for All Summit  
Catawba-Wateree Water Management Group  
Mike McGill, President***



**You must become or stay  
THE GO-TO source for information  
about your drinking water.**

# Old Days, Old Ways are OVER

- **Old mindset: “Customers don’t know what I know about water.”  
“I’ll tell them what I want when I want.”**
- **Old scar tissue: “Why should I stick my neck out?  
The press only cares about a bad bill or a bad break.”**
- **“Out of sight? Out of mind? Fine by me.”**

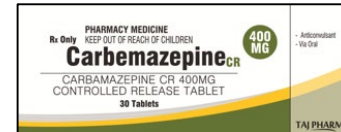
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- **Thanks to social media, those days are OVER.**
- **We live in The Instant Information Age.**
- **Stick with OLD mindset? Playing Russian Roulette with reputation.**
- **Not talking days or weeks of damage. Talking YEARS.**



# PFAS & Emerging Contaminants

- **So what are PFAS & ECs? Why are we here?**
- **ECs = Chemicals detected/being detected in trace amounts largely due to advances in water testing**
- **Risks to health & environment not yet understood**
- **Little - if any - health/medical data on almost all of them**
- **EPA "conservative" estimate: 4,500 in nation's source waters**



# PFAS & Emerging Contaminants

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- **Man-made chemicals produced since 1940s**
  - Think Teflon & Gore-Tex. Anything water/stain-resistant.
  - Fire-fighting foam. Discoveries near airbases, airports.
  - Just found in Oral-B Glide dental floss



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- **Persistent in the environment & ALL OF US. 99.7% of us. Don't break down. Accumulate in body. Blood & organs.**
- **PFOA & PFOS: 2 PFAS phasing out due to associations with adverse health risks. Cancer, thyroid, pregnancy impacts.**  
***NO drinking water standards.***



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- **Flint. Shook public confidence across the country.**
- **Shorthand for almost ANY water quality issue**
- **Like Flint, PFAS/EC news could create doubt anywhere**
- **1000s of chemicals are in our nation's water supplies**
- **Found in unexpected places, at unexpected times**
- **Utilities caught off-guard: Reputations can be wiped out in days**



# GenX: NC's PFAS

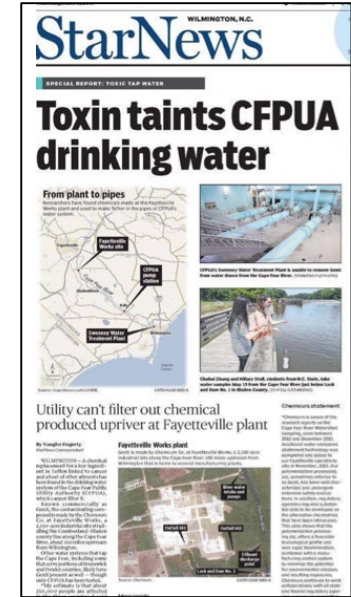
- **2016 NC State study, with cooperation of water utility:**
  - Found several PFASs in Cape Fear River downstream from Chemours plant
  - Drinking water levels well above EPA's "lifetime health advisory" of 70 ppt
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**Suspected carcinogen led to \$671 million settlement in WVA**
  - June 2017: Story hits. Becomes local & national bombshell.

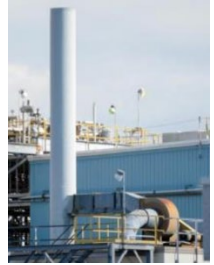


Wilmington NC  
= Flint MI  
☠ GEN X ☠



# How Did We Get Here?

- **Personal use & discharges into water, air**
  - Discharges allowed w/little data required
  - Regulatory processes little more than the Honor System
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- **“Discovery Cycle”** *(To protect public health.)*
  - Fund water testing? Gain news-making, legislative results. Leads to more funding. Likely to gain...
  - NC Collaboratory: “Create early warning system”
  - Pace of regulatory guidance lags behind
    - UCMRs. 30 at a time. Doesn't mean we get MCLs.
    - Federal and state health advisories shifting





**N.C. Coastal Fed** ✓

@NCCoastalFed

Following



At @NCCULAW forum: @DukeEnvironment Prof Ferguson: preventing more #GenX crises requires weekly/monthly testing of public h2O to create “alarm system” so Public & govt & biz can respond when a pollutant appears #ncga #ncpol

7:51 PM - 22 Mar 2018



**N.C. Coastal Fed** ✓

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Following



At @NCCULAW #genx forum:  
@DukeEnvironment Prof Ferguson says w/o an “alarm system” to detect pollution there’s no way to prevent undetected public consumption of chems like #Genx in our #water #ncpol #ncga

7:56 PM - 22 Mar 2018





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# How? Proactive Communications

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  - **Satisfaction scores 20% higher when customers remembered ONE proactive communication in last 3 months**
  - **Best results: Customers recalling SIX or more communications in 12 months gave up to 30% higher scores**



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- ***Need to work with the media. WQA:* In 2015, 27% of customers said they learned about contaminants from news media. **2017? 43%.****



# PFAS & EC Preparations

- **Number #1 Rule: Put yourself in your customers' shoes**
- **J.D. Power: Nearly 1/3 of customers report a “water quality issue”**
- **Biggest mistake: Arrogance. “You’ll know what we want, when we want.”**
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- **All trust can be wiped out by ONE headline**
- **Create COMMS plan for PFAS & EC discoveries:**
  - You’ll be ready whenever/however a story makes news
  - Use “planned transparency.” Helps you gain trust while exercising control.
  - Contains vetted customer information for multiple platforms
  - Incorporates community, social media relationships

# PFAS & EC Messages

- **Lead with messages supporting your important, expert role**
- ***“Based on our knowledge, experience, duty to protect public health”:***
  - *Water is our life. We share concerns about these discoveries.*
  - *Your water meets/exceeds federal & state standards for safety, quality*
  - *We’re taking action. We will continue to deliver safe, clean water.*
  - *Important information always available from us. It’s our responsibility.*
  - *Whenever you are concerned, we’re here. Ask us.*
  - *Stay informed, but use credible sources. Be careful with social media.*

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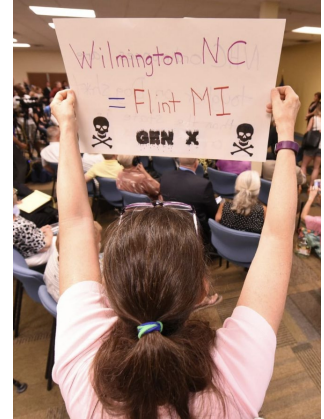
- ***“Our Duty”***
  - *Hard-working people dedicated to delivering safe, clean water to you. 24/7/365.*
  - *We drink the water too. We wouldn't provide water our families shouldn't drink.*
- ***“Working for you”***
  - *Water is our life. This is our job for the communities we serve.*
  - *Working on solutions with regulatory agencies, industry leaders, scientists*
- ***“Perspective”***
  - *Explain what EPA & state health advisories are, what they mean*
  - *Testing advances finding “compounds” at parts per trillion levels*
    - *One second in 32,000 years*
    - *The first six inches on a trip to the Sun*
    - *One drop of food coloring in 18 MILLION gallons of water*





# Summary

- **PFAS & EC Issues are NOT going away**
  - Advances in water testing
  - Slow regulatory processes
  - “Discovery Cycle”
- **Need to prepare now:**
  - Proactive communications boost public trust
  - Build/strengthen customer relationships, including social media
  - Develop a PFAS & EC COMMS plan
- **Respect the customer.** Planned transparency. Gains control & trust.
- Use “Our Duty,” “Working for You,” & “Perspective” messages





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