#### **Thank you to our Patrons**





















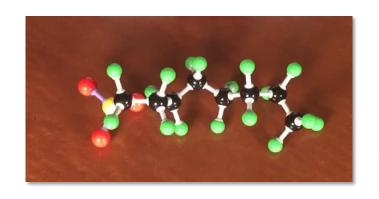




We will begin our presentation in a few minutes...



# Adapting to the Challenge of PFAS Remediation at Impacted Sites



Charles Newell, GSI Environmental Inc.
Randy Sillan, AECOM
Jeff McDonough, CDM Smith









#### **Presenters**



PFAS Problem

Chem & Tox

Newell

Newell

**Conceptual Models** 

Sillan

F&T Unsaturated

Sillan

5. F&T Saturated

Destruction

Newell

Treatment in-situ

Treatment ex-situ

McDonough

**McDonough** 

McDonough





Randy Sillan, BCEE **AECOM** randy.sillan@aecom.com



Jeffrey McDonough, BCEE CDM Smith, Inc.

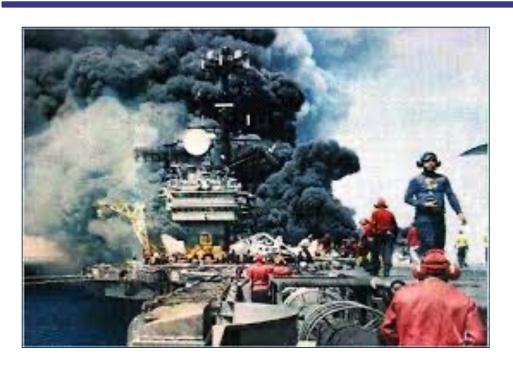
mcdonoughjt@cdmsmith.com





# **The PFAS Problem**

# PFAS History – Aqueous Film Foaming Foam (AFFF) for Fire Fighting



**USS Forrestal Fire 1967** 



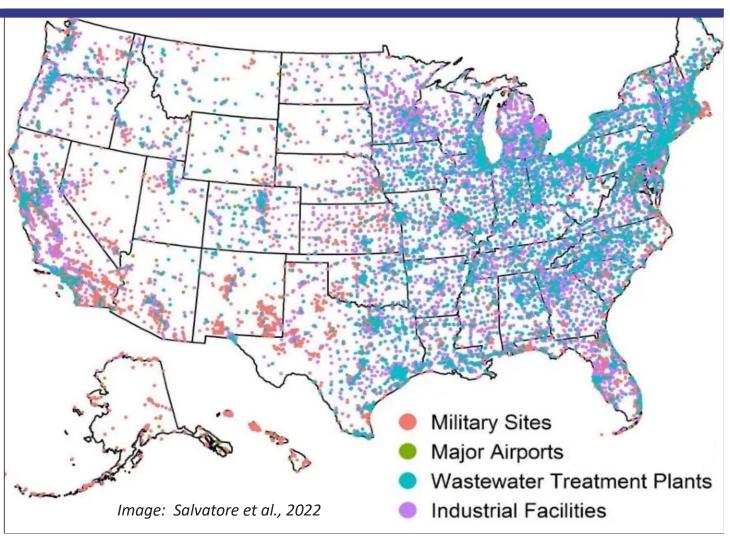
Milspec Aqueous Film Forming
Foam (AFFF): PFAS
Lightwater, Ansulite, etc.

## Potential PFAS Impacted Sites (Salvatore et al. 2022)



# 57,412 sites of presumptive PFAS contamination:

- 49,145 industrial facilities
- 4,255 wastewater tmt. plants
- 3,493 military sites
- 519 major airports



#### The PFAS Problem: Focus Areas & Potential Costs





Remediation: \$88 billion

Drinking Water: \$21 billion

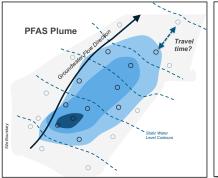
Wastewater: \$24 billion

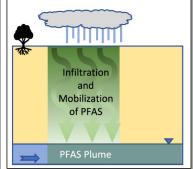
Total 30-Yr Costs: ~\$132 billion

#### About two thirds associated with:

- Aviation AFFF sites
- PFAS Manufacturing
- Manufacturing Using PFAS
- Landfills





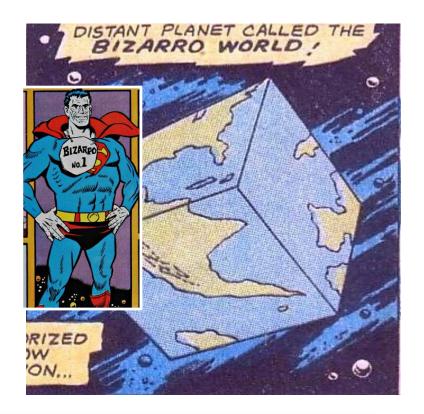




Stormwater

# Four Drivers for that Make PFAS "Bizzaro World" For Groundwater Remediation

- No current evidence of in-situ degradation of regulated PFAAs!
- › Biodegradation doesn't help, it hurts!
- > Front-line technology is Pump & Treat?
- Concentrations: single digit ng / Liter?



# Perspective from PFAS Experts Symposium (2019)



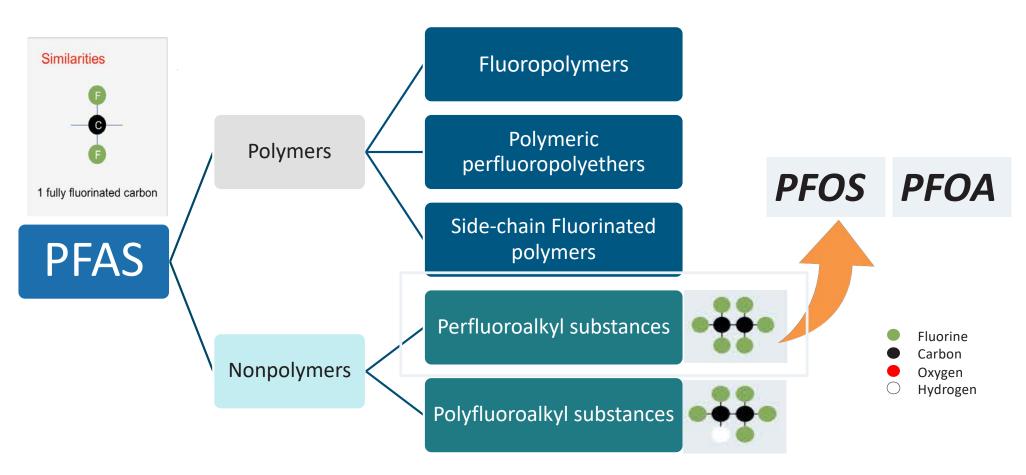
"The consensus message from the Symposium participants is that PFAS present far more complex challenges to the environmental community than prior contaminants."

COMMENTARY	WILEY
PFAS Experts Symposium: Statements on regula chemistry and analtyics, toxicology, transport/fi remediation for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substa contamination issues	ate, and
John A. Simon <sup>1</sup>   Stew Abrams <sup>2</sup>   Tim Bradburne <sup>3</sup>   Dan Bryant <sup>4</sup>   Daniel Cassidy <sup>6</sup>   John Cherry <sup>7</sup>   Sheau-Yun (Dora) Chiang <sup>8</sup>   Dou Michelle Crimi <sup>10</sup>   Elizabeth Denly <sup>11</sup>   Bill DiGuiseppi <sup>12</sup>   Jim Fen Stephanie Fiorenza <sup>14</sup>   Joseph Guarnaccia <sup>15</sup>   Nathan Hagelin <sup>16</sup>   John Hesemann <sup>18</sup>   Erika Houtz <sup>19</sup>   Stephen S. Koenigsberg <sup>20</sup>   Find Jeffrey Longsworth <sup>22</sup>   Tom Maher <sup>23</sup>   Angus McGrath <sup>24</sup>   Ravi N Charles J. Newell <sup>26</sup>   Beth L. Parker <sup>27</sup>   Tadbir Singh <sup>28</sup>   Paul Tom	iglas Cox <sup>9</sup>   stermacher <sup>13</sup>   Linda Hall <sup>17</sup>   rancois Lauzon <sup>21</sup>   Jaidu <sup>25</sup>

# PFAS Chemistry and Toxicology

### PFAS Family: Three Main Groups





Source: J Gamlin, GSI Environmental

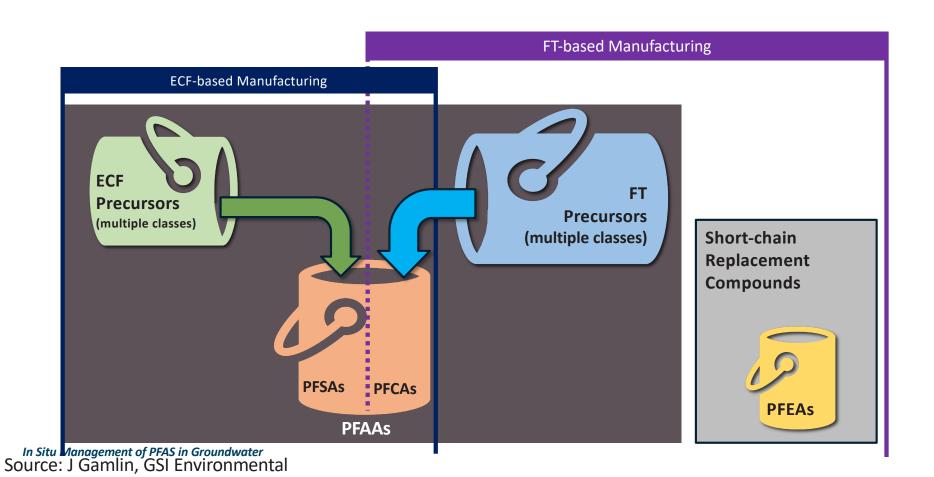
# **3 Generalized Classes of Non-polymer PFAS**



- > PFAAs: Perfluoroalkyl acids (fully fluorinated) (don't degrade)
  - > PFSAs: Perfluoroalkyl sulfonic acids (e.g., perfluorooctane sulfonic acid PFOS)
  - > PFCAs: Perfluoroalkyl carboxylic acids (e.g., perfluorooctanoic acid PFOA)
- > Precursors: PFAS that turn into other PFAS (partially fluorinated) (bad thing?)
  - > ECF: Electrochemical fluorination-based precursors
  - > FT: Fluorotelomerization-based precursors
- > PFEAs: Per- and polyfluoroalkyl ether acids ("replacements")

## **Generalized PFAS "Buckets"**





13

#### **Evolution of PFAS Use in AFFF**



- ◆ 1960s–1980s: Electrochemical Fluorination (3M "Light Water") (Key PFAA: PFOS)
- ◆ 1980s–2000s: Fluorotelomer-Based AFFF (C6 Precursors) (Ansul, others) fluorotelomer sulfonates that degrade into PFOA and shorter-chain PFAAs (e.g., PFHxA).
- 2000s-2010s: Phaseout of Long-Chain PFAS (C8s like PFOS PFOA)
- ◆ 2010s—Present: Emergence of GenX and Short-Chain Replacements
- 2023–2024: U.S. Department of Defense Fluorinated AFFF Phaseout

#### Aqueous Film-Forming Foam (AFFF) Manufacturing & Qualified Products List (QPL) Timeline:

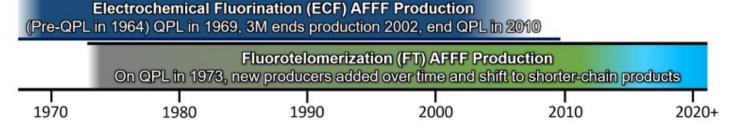
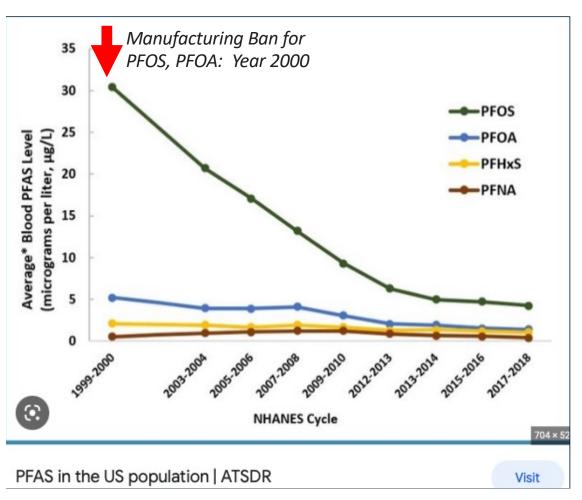


Figure 1. Summary of AFFF manufacturing process and years on the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) AFFF QPL. ECF AFFF was produced the earliest and production has since been phased out in the U.S. Production of FT AFFF began later and has shifted to shorter-chain PFAS formulations in recent years (noted by color change from green to light blue).

Source: Gamlin et al., 2024

## **PFAA Concentrations in Blood 1990-2018**

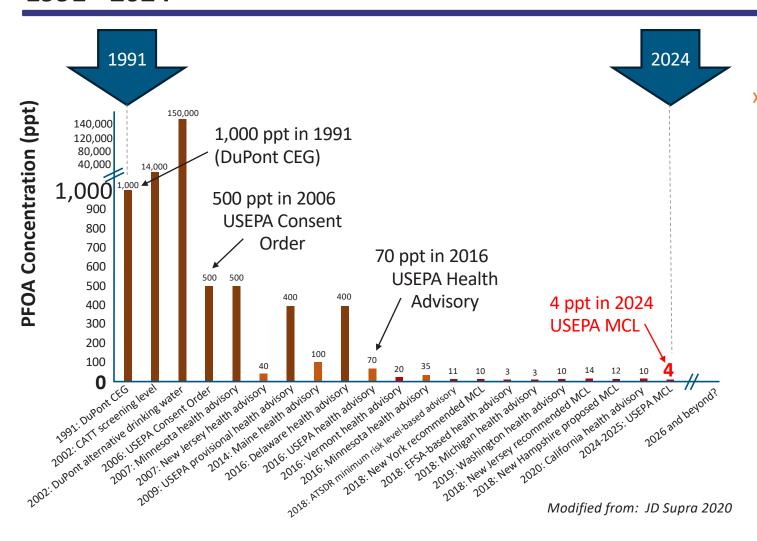






# **Evolving PFOA Drinking Water Advisory/Guideline Levels** 1991 - 2024





Ongoing debate among toxicologists that some PFAS criteria may be set too low (e.g., Burgoon et al. 2023)

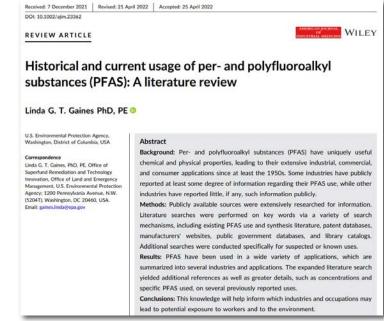
PFOA	MCL
USEPA	4.0 ng/L
Mid-Point Burgoon et al. 2023	280 ng/L
X Higher	70X

# **PFAS Conceptual Models**

#### Literature Review of Potential PFAS "Sources"

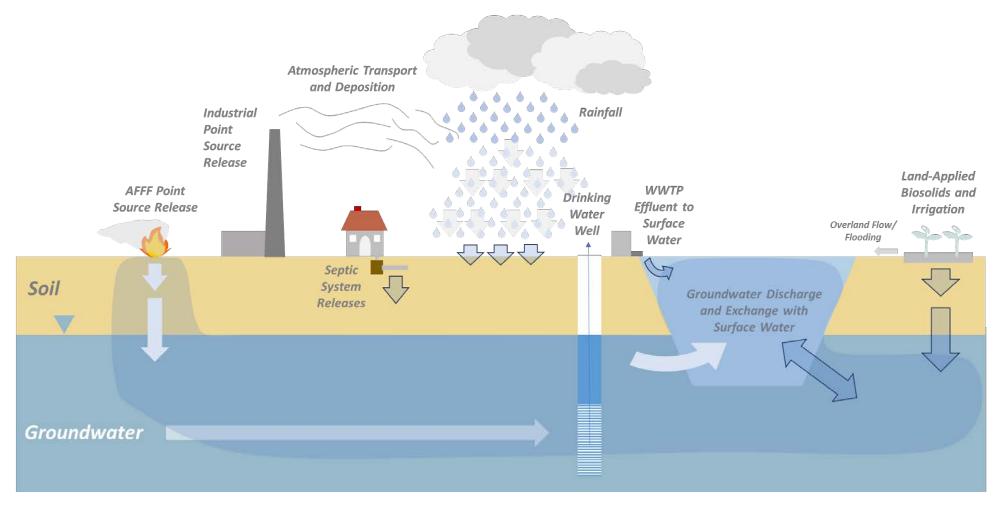
- AFFF
- Metal Plating and Machining
- **Landfills**
- Septage and Wastewater
  - Personal Care Products and Cosmetics
- Paper and Packaging Products
- Textiles and Carpets
- Coatings and Adhesives
- Cleaning Agents and Waxes

- Pesticides and Herbicides
- > Transportation Industry
- Plastics and Rubbers
- Printing, Etching, and Photography
- Medical Sector
- Electronics and Energy Sector
- > Building and Construction Industry
- Mining, Oil, and Gas



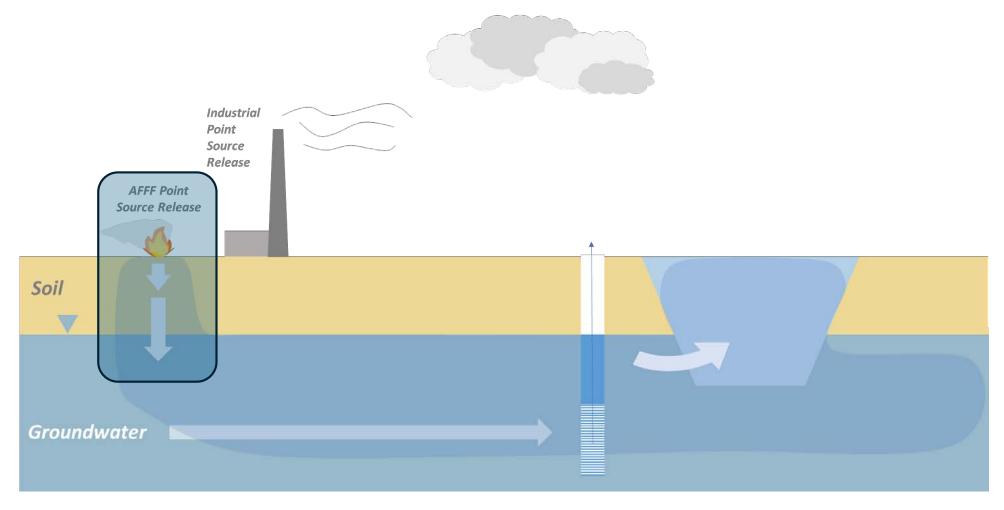
Modified from Glüge et al. (2020) and Gaines (2022) – this list is not intended to be all inclusive and may not be applicable in some cases

#### **PFAS Sources**



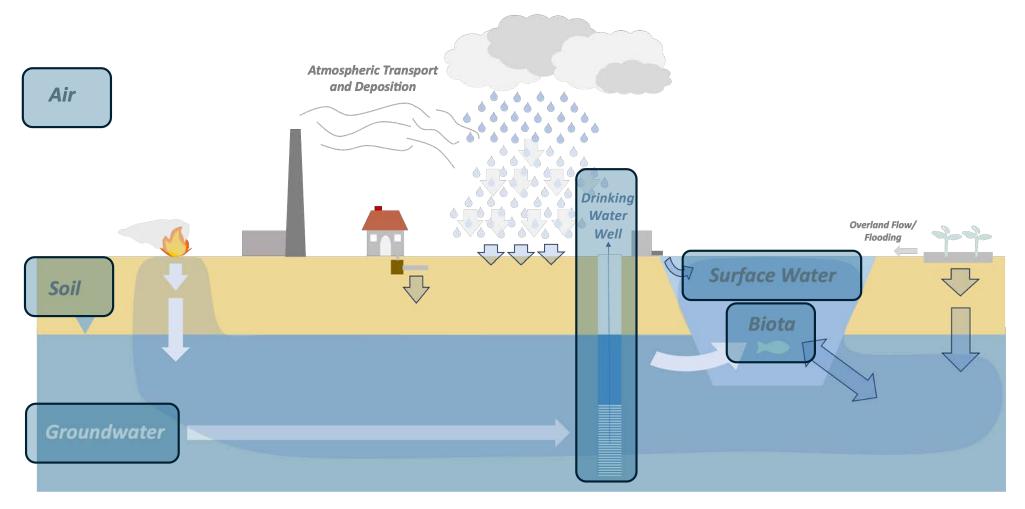
Source: D. Adamson, GSI Environmental Inc.

# **PFAS Sources – AFFF is the Priority Point Source**



Source: D. Adamson, GSI Environmental Inc.

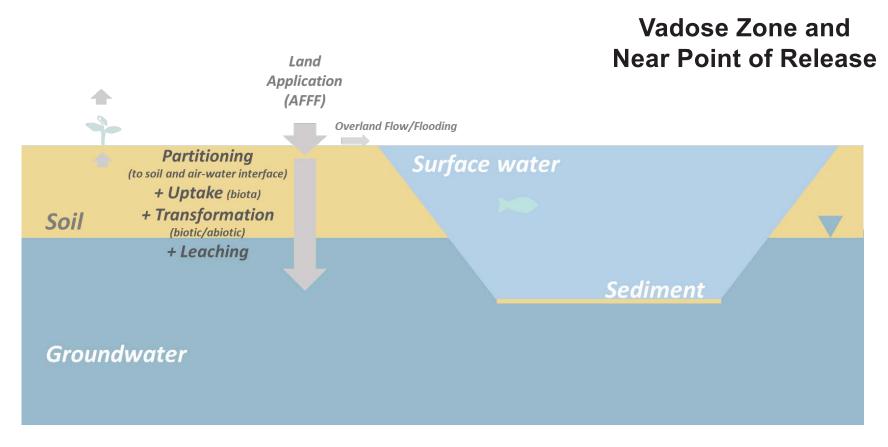
# **Relevant Media and Receptors**



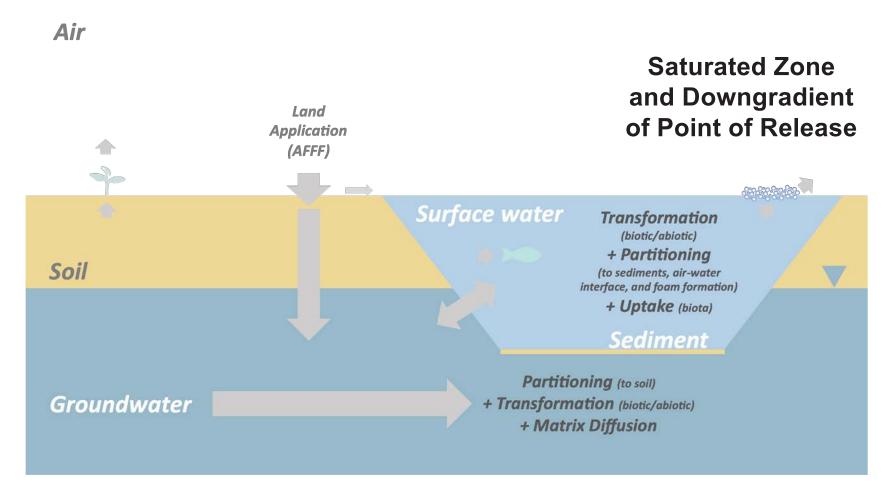
Source: D. Adamson, GSI Environmental Inc.

## **Overview of PFAS Fate and Transport Processes**

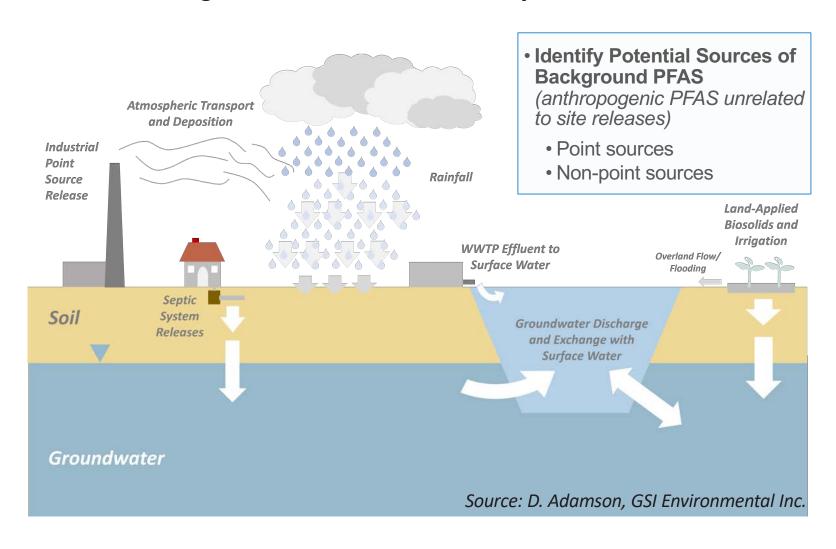
Air



## **Overview of PFAS Fate and Transport Processes**



#### **Background PFAS – Assessment Objectives**

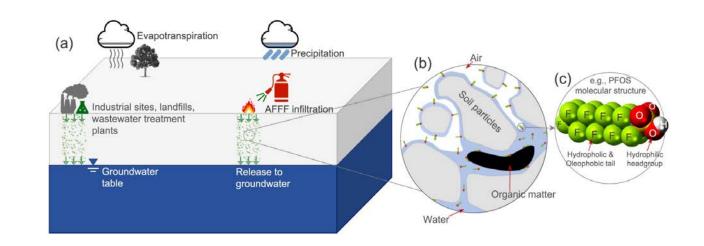


# PFAS Fate & Transport: Unsaturated Zone



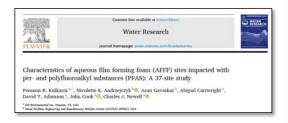
#### **Key PFAS Retention Processes: Air-Water Partitioning**

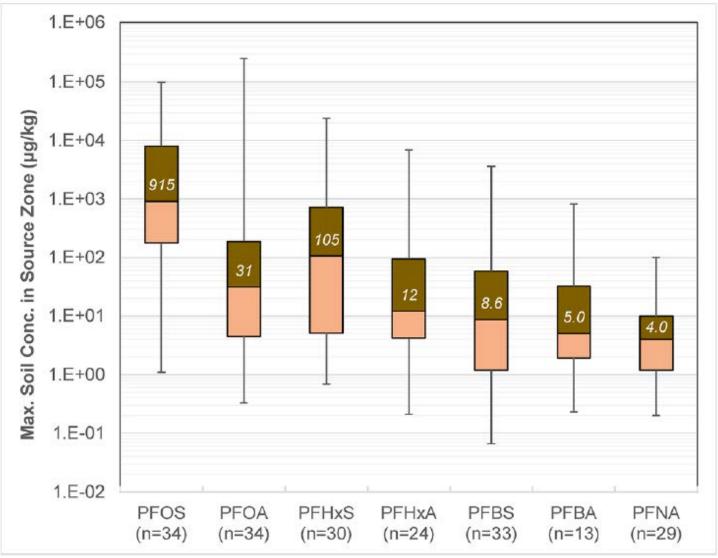
- PFAS are surfactants
- They like to accumulate at air/water interfaces
- This can retain some PFAS in the unsaturated zone for a long time
- Depends on site, but "can take several decades or longer for PFOS to reach groundwater."



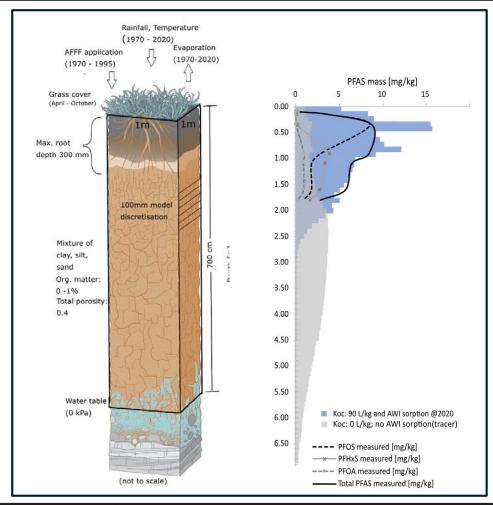
Guo et al., 2020

Distribution of
Maximum PFAA
Concentrations in
the top 10 Feet of
the Soil Column in
or Near the Source
Zone (Kulkarni et
al., 2025)





### Vadose Zone Processes



#### **Evapoconcentration**

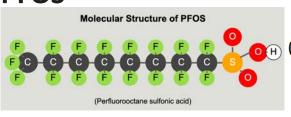
- During dry periods, evapotranspiration rates can be greater than rainfall rates
- Results in upward flow of porewater and the PFAS present in that porewater
- Can contribute to higher PFAS
   concentrations in shallow zones
   above the "zero-flux plane" (divide
   where porewater travels upward vs.
   downward)

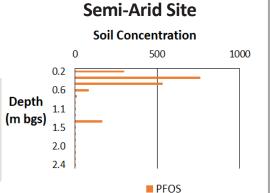
Source: Wallis et al. (2022)

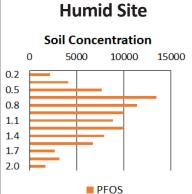
#### **PFAS Concentration vs. Depth**

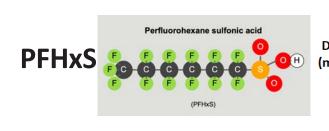
Schaefer et al., 2024

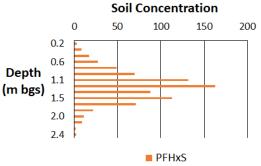
**PFOS** 

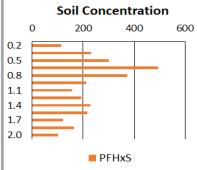






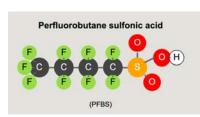


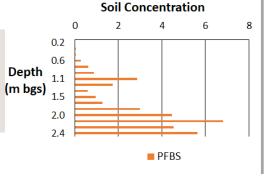


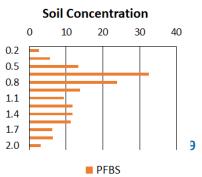


Schaefer et al. (2024) Journal Contaminant Hydrology "PFAS Porewater concentrations in unsaturated soil"







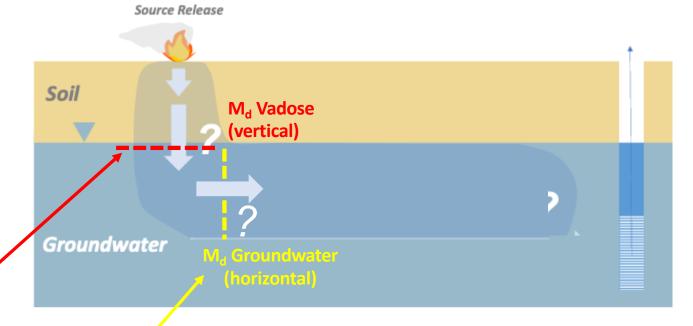


# One Key Goal: Compare PFAS Mass Discharge in *Vadose Zone vs Groundwater*

Original Figure:
D. Adamson, GSI Environmental

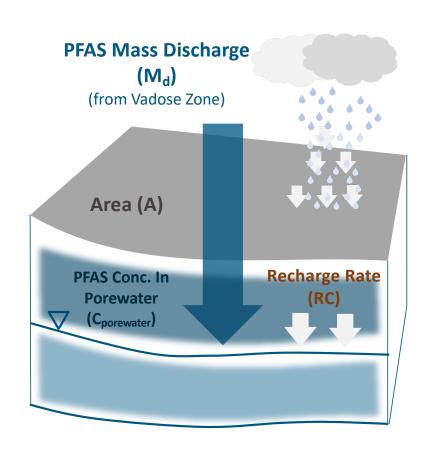
#### M<sub>d</sub> (mass discharge)

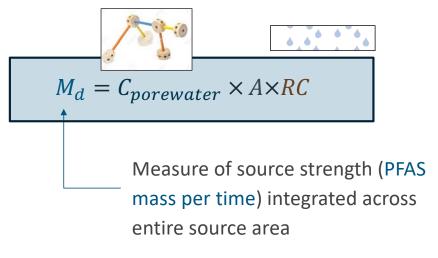
describes the strength of of a PFAS source in units of grams per year (e.g., "30 grams of PFOS per year)



	Mass Discharge in Vadose Zone	Mass Discharge in Groundwater	Implication
Scenario 1	High	Low	Vadose Zone Cleanup More Important
Scenario 2	Low	High	Vadose Zone Cleanup Less Important

#### **Key Process: Vadose Zone Mass Discharge**



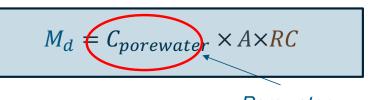


M<sub>d</sub> (mass discharge) describes the strength of vadose zone sources in units of grams per year (e.g., "30 grams of PFOS per year" are being transported vertically from PFAS-impacted soils to groundwater)

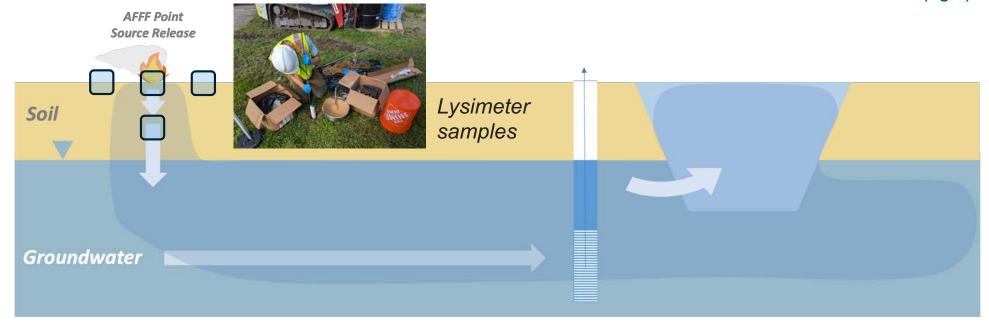
#### **How Do You Get Porewater Concentrations?**



- There are multiple methods (partitioning equations, leaching tests)
- One common approach uses suction lysimeters to directly measure porewater concentrations.



Porewater concentration (ng/L)



Source: D. Adamson, GSI Environmental Inc.

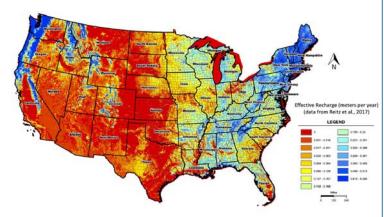
### How Do You Get the Recharge Rate?



There are multiple methods divided into three separate Recharge Tiers:

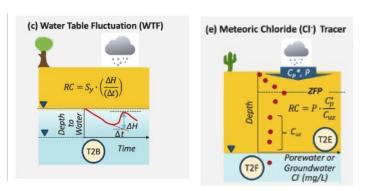
$$M_d = C_{porewater} \times A \times RC$$
 Recharge (inches per year)

# Tier 1 Desktop Methods Based on Equations, Maps, Settings



Example: Nationwide Runoff Map Method

# Tier 2 Simple Methods Based on Site Data



Two Examples:

- Water Table Fluctuation (WTF) Method
- Meteoric Chloride Methods

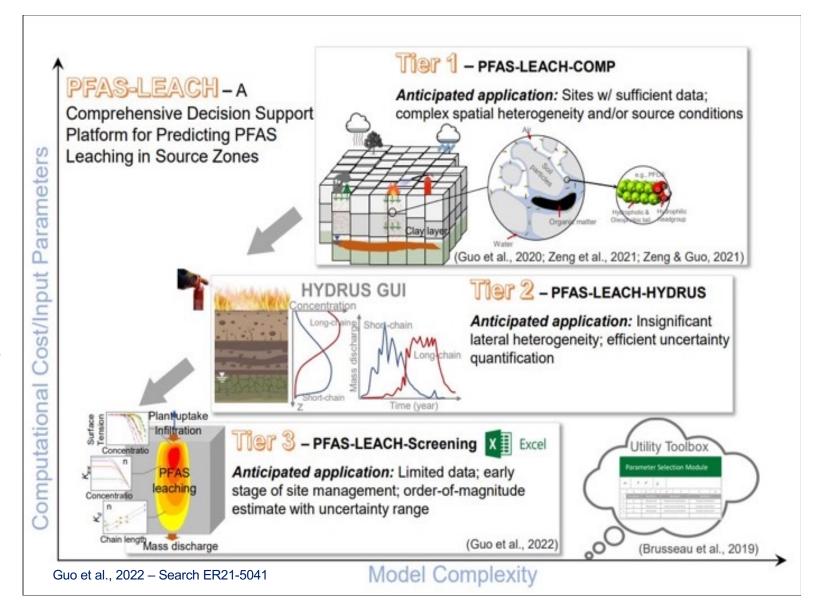
#### Tier 3 Detailed, More Complex Methods

Two Examples: Numerical modeling, applied tracers

#### ESTCP's PFAS Leach Platform (Guo et al.)

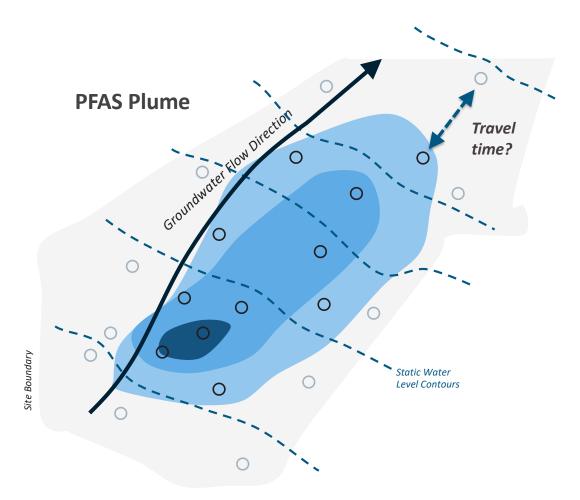
Tier 3 Screening Model Tier 2 HYDRUS Model Tier 1 Complex model

Enter in soil concentrations, climate data, soil data, groundwater data and these models estimate PFAS mass discharge to groundwater



# PFAS Fate & Transport: Saturated Zone

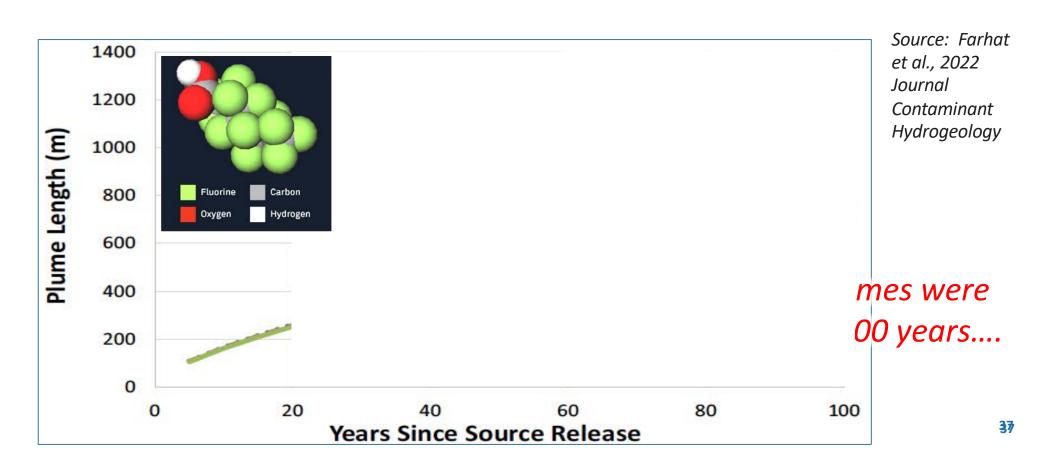
# Advection, Dispersion, Sorption, Matrix Diffusion



- Migration of dissolved-phase PFAS is a function of the hydraulic gradient of groundwater
- Dispersion may also occur during advective transport, but effects on plume may be minor
- Advection is a strong influence on plume advancement rates, but other processes (e.g., sorption, matrix diffusion) can slow it down
- Matrix diffusion is key retention process for PFAS plumes

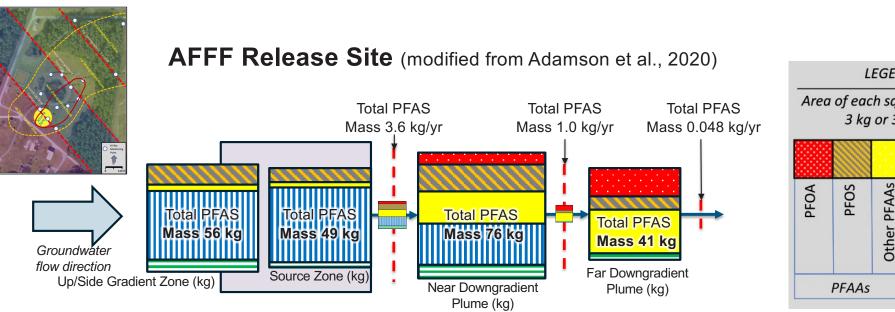
Source: D. Adamson, GSI Environmental Inc.

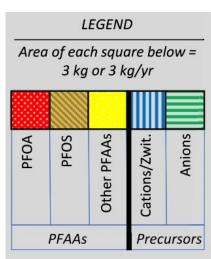
# Remediation of PFAS in Groundwater: Computer Modeling a Non-Degrading Groundwater Plume



### **PFAS Mass Balances**







**KEY POINT: PFAS spatial** distribution was explainable based on site conditions and expected F&T processes

- Precursors & long-chain PFAAs tended to stay closer to source area
- Short-chain PFAAs tend to migrate farther from the source area
- PFCAs tend to migrate farther than PFSAs of similar chain length

### PFAS Groundwater Cleanup Calculus



Non-Degrading Plumes Lack of In-SituDestructiveTechnologies

More ExpandingPlumes Than WeAre Used To?

More Expanding
Plumes Than We +
Are Used To?

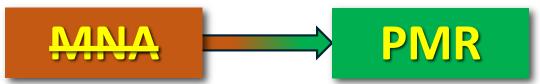
Low Action Levels (e.g., 4 ng/L) Lots and Lots of Pump & Treat & Permeable Sorption Barriers?

### PFAS are Not *Immobilized* in the Subsurface. But at Some Sites PFAS are *Retained* for Long Timescales



- Immobilization: Permanent trapping & isolation of a chemical in the environment.
- **Retention:** The storage of a chemical in the environment so that the chemical is isolated from potential receptors for a certain time.

**Key Point:** At some PFAS sites, **PFAS Monitored Retention (PMR)** may be appropriate via strong air/water partitioning, sorption, matrix diffusion retention processes.





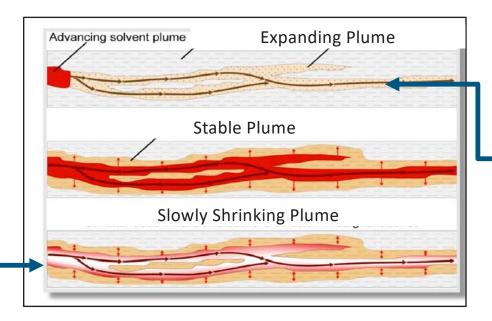
**Monitored Natural Attenuation** of Inorganic Contaminants in





Most chlorinated sites down here:
Matrix diffusion makes it harder to remediate

**Matrix Diffusion Bad** 



PFAAs don't readily degrade, so there may be more expanding PFAS plumes.

But matrix diffusion is retaining PFAS, therefore slowing plume expansion

**Matrix Diffusion Good!** 

### **Potential PFAS Management Framework**



### **Knowing a Site's**

- Mass Discharge
- Travel Time to Nearest Receptor

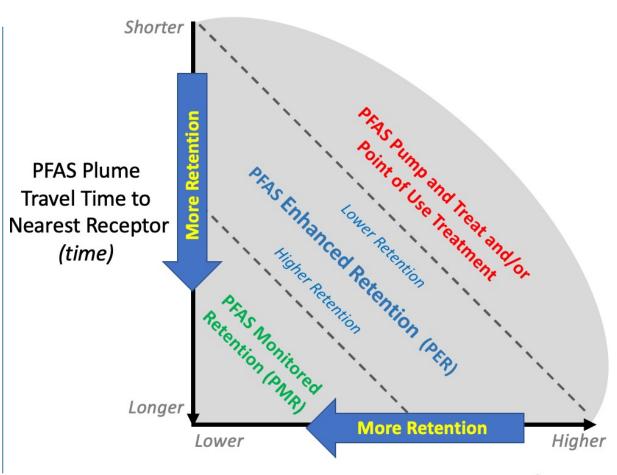
### May be useful for

- Selecting interim actions
- Prioritizing remediation
- Managing scare resources

Adamson et al., 2025 (GWMR)

PFAS Monitored Retention A Framework for

Managing PFAS (open access)



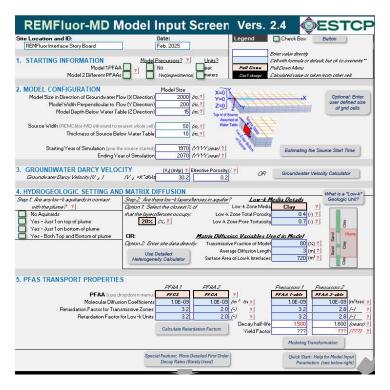
PFAS Plume Mass Discharge (mass/time)

### Two PFAS Models from ESTCP



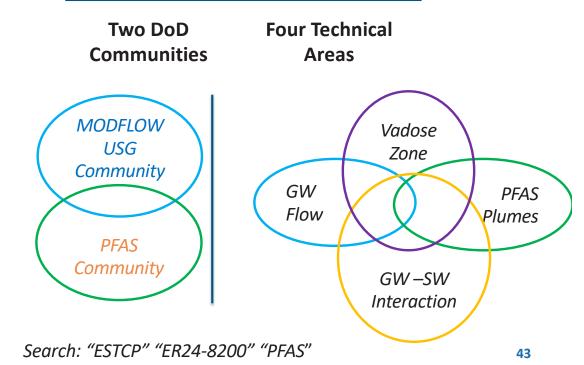
### REMFluor-MD Model

- Mid-complexity groundwater model
- Answers "How long, how far" plume questions
- > Available early 2026



### USGT-PFAS Model

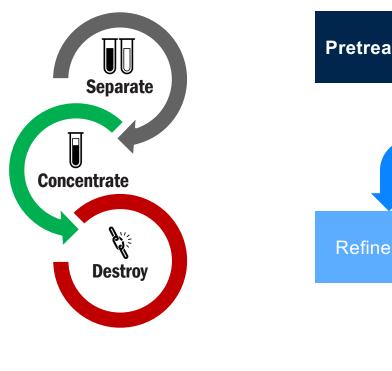
- More powerful but more complex model
- New capability to model PFAS in Unsat. Zone
- Already developed, ready for more testing

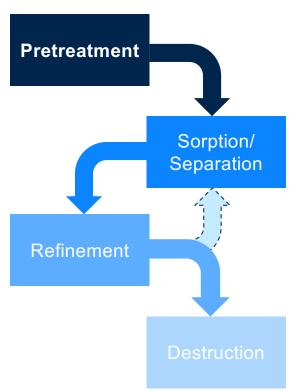


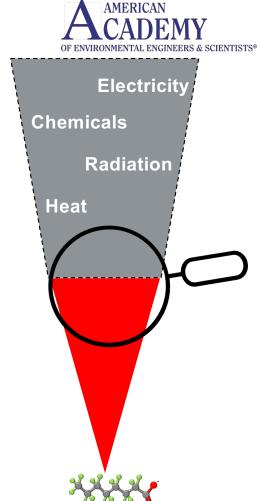
# PFAS Treatment Approaches

No endorsement is intended for any technology Some technology providers are identified as a resource for the audience and is not meant to be exhaustive

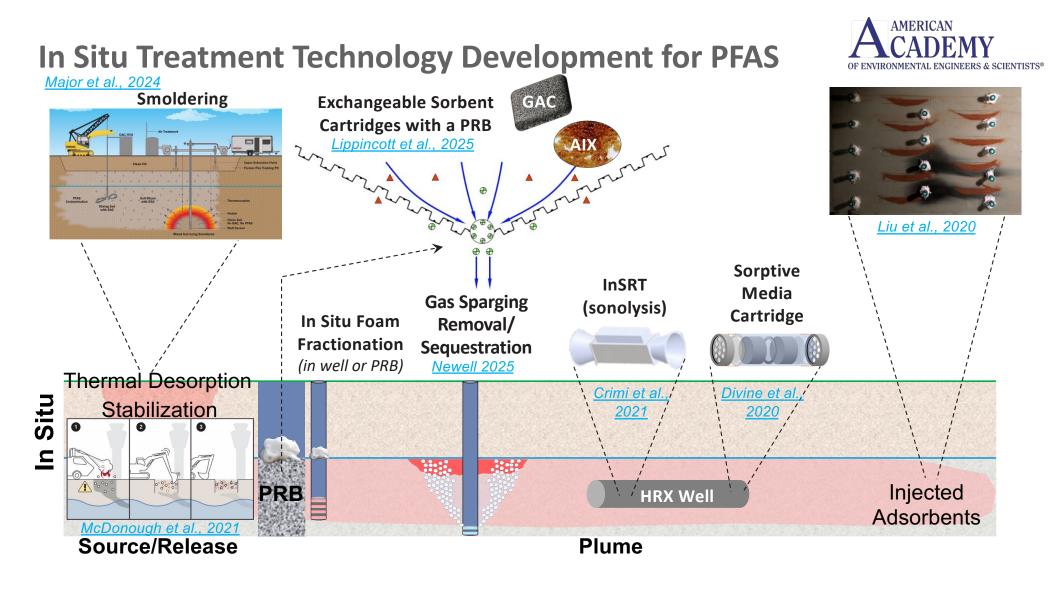
### **PFAS Remediation: State of the Practice**







<u>State of the Practice</u>: Serial treatment to concentrate PFAS and reduce the volume requiring energy intensive destruction



### **Ex Situ PFAS Treatment Technologies**



Groundwater Extraction

Excavation
Soil Washing
Ball Milling
Capping
Thermal Desorption

### Sorption

**Activated Carbon (granular** 

[GAC], powdered [PAC],
sub-micron [SPAC])
lon Exchange (IX)
Biochar, Graphene Based
Sorbents, Modified Clays,
Hydrogels/Fluorogels,
Polymeric Adsorbents,
Metallic Organic Frameworks
(MOF), Layered Double
Hydroxides (LDH)

### Separation

**Reverse Osmosis** 

Nanofiltration
Foam Fractionation
Electrocoagulation
Flocculation
Evaporators

### **Destruction**

Incineration
Hydrothermal
Electrochemical Oxidation
UV-radiated Sensitizers
Nonthermal Plasma
Sonolysis
Photolysis/Photocatalysis
Thermal Plasma
Decarboxylation/Thermal
Electron Beam (Ebeam)
Chemical Oxidation

Source/Release

Situ

**Plume** 

### PFAS-Relevant Sorption: Its not just GAC and Resin!!!



### GAC/ Resins

- · "Go to" sorbents
- Economical, scalable, accepted



- Fluorosorb®; pyrolyzed cellulose
- Available & competitive



- DEXSORB®; PQ-Osorb®; Puraffinity®
- Promising, improving scalability

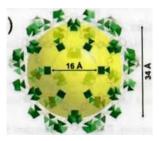


- MOFs<sup>1</sup>; Hydro/Fluorogels; LDHs<sup>2</sup>; 2-phase composites
- Esoteric, high sorption capacities

<sup>1</sup>Metallic Organic Frameworks; <sup>2</sup>Layered Double Hydroxides



FluoroSorb (CETCO, 2023)



MOF Concept Barpaga et al., 2019



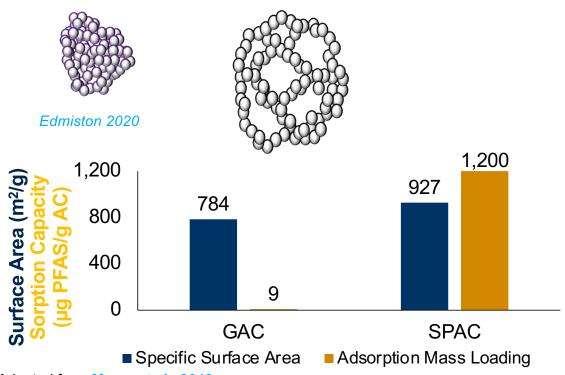
DEXSORB (Cyclopure 2025)



PQ-Osorb (ABS Materials 2018)

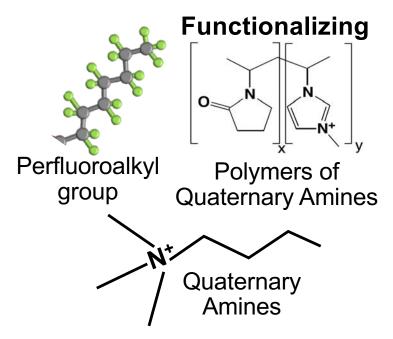
### **PFAS-Relevant Sorption: Optimization**

### **Increased Access to Surface Area**



Adapted from Murry et al., 2019



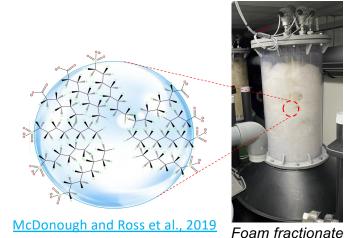


Reactivation (GAC) and Regeneration (other sorbents)

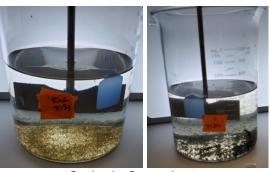
Various solvents
Electro-Sorption/Desorption

## **Separation Developments**

### **Foam Fractionation**



### Flocculation/ Coagulation



Cationic Coagulants (Menkhaus 2020)





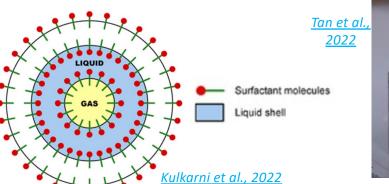
Field-Scale RO (Storch, 2018)

**Membrane Separation** 

**AMERICAN** 

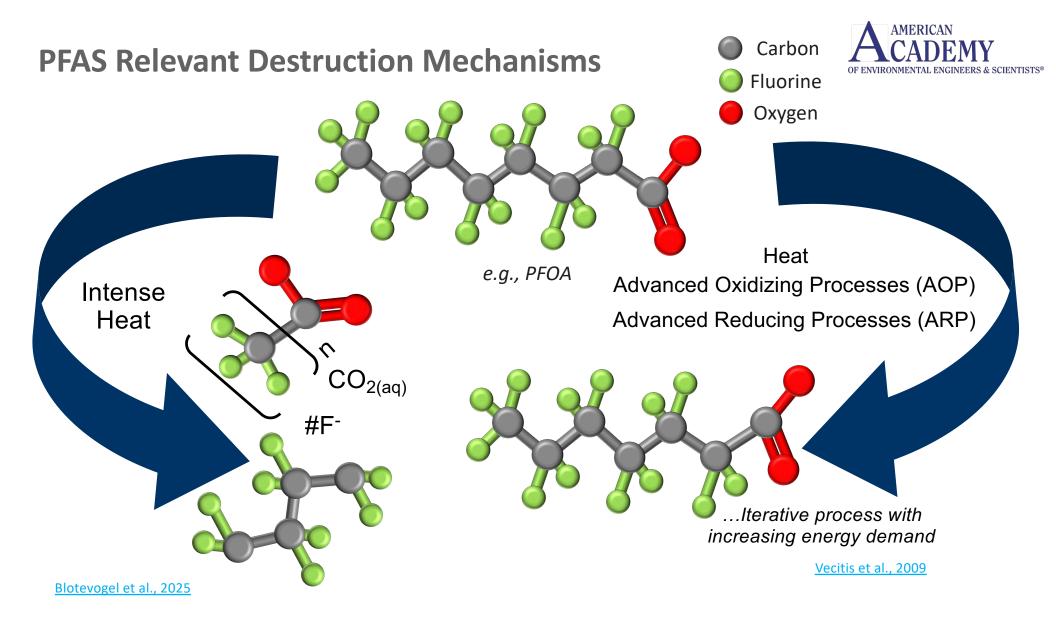


Municipal-Scale RO (Bellona, 2023)



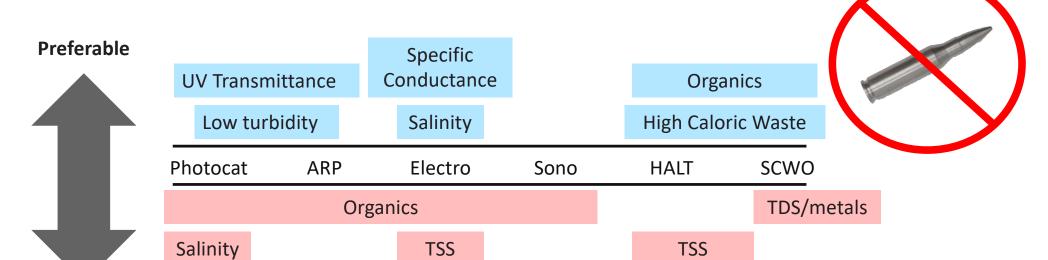
(EPOC, 2023)





### There's no silver bullet...

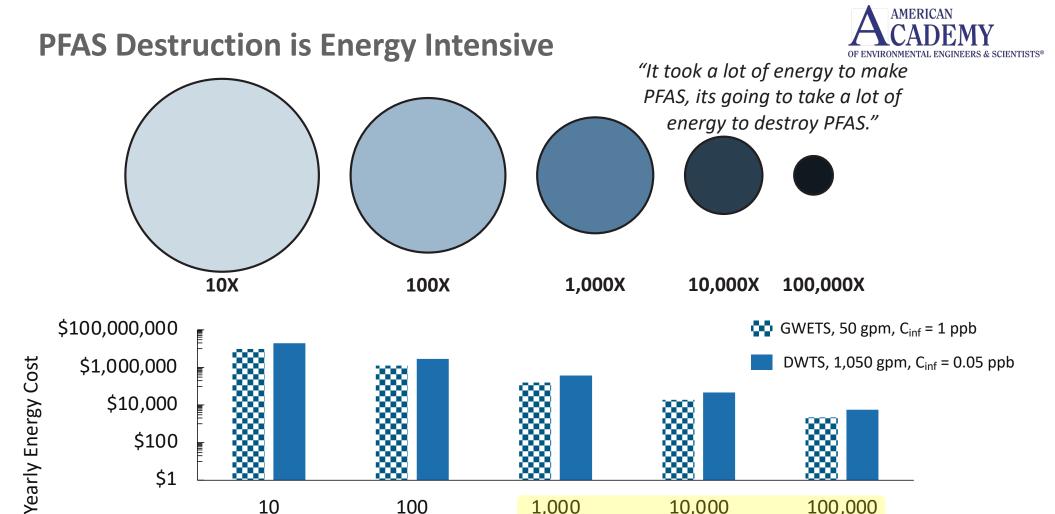




Manageable, but less preferable

Unlikely to be only 1 ideal PFAS Destruction Technology

TDS = total dissolved solids TSS = total suspended solids



1,000

10,000

100,000

10

**Concentration Factor** 

100

### **Main Incineration Takeaways**



Approaching industry consensus: >1,000°C for >2 s gas phase residence time with proper mixing and excess hydrogen for adequate destruction (atmospheric pressure)



**Complete Mineralization** 

**Method Limitations** 

Adequate **Destruction** 

**USEPA 2024 (Section 3a, pg 44)** 

USEPA Sept 2025 HWI Confirmation Study

June 2025
Confirmation Study

### **Biological Processes for Perfluoroalkyl Acids (PFAAs)**



Unsaturated C-F bonds\*

Feammox\*

Fungal transformation\*

Partial defluorination\*

Plausible alternative explanations\*

Impractical rate kinetics\*

Aerobic/anaerobic competition\*

Electronegativity, C-F density yields stability/recalcitrance\*

Indigenous bacteria have not evolved to attack DEAG

\*Citations available upon request



Biological defluorination is not currently a viable remedial strategy

### **Considerations for Commercially Available PFAS RDTs**



- ☐ Field-scale capacity: 100s to 1,000s of gallons per day
- ☐ CAPEX: \$1.5 to \$4 M each
- Immature understanding of OPEX (intense reaction conditions + complex waste streams = high cost)
- Multiple field-scale studies performed

### **Electrochemical Oxidation**



(Axine, 2025)

### **Non-Thermal Plasma**



(DMAX Plasma, 2022)

### **Hydrothermal**



(Aquagga, 2025)

### **UV-Radiated Sensitizers**

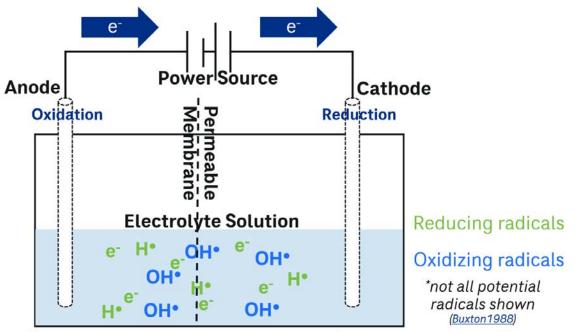


(Claros Technologies, 2025)

### **Electrochemical Oxidation**



- Mechanism(s): Direct electron transfer at the surface of an anode and/or electrolysis generates reactive radicals within the electrolyte
- Some Commercial Vendors: OXbyEL, Blue Eden Clean Technologies, Aclarity, Dynamic Water Technologies, Axine Water Technologies, Gradiant, Lummus Technology, Ovivo
- Some Concerns: Long residence times, secondary water quality, anode durability and PFASs retention



- 1) Direct electron transfer from PFAS to anode
- 2) Achieves electrolysis within electrolyte solution



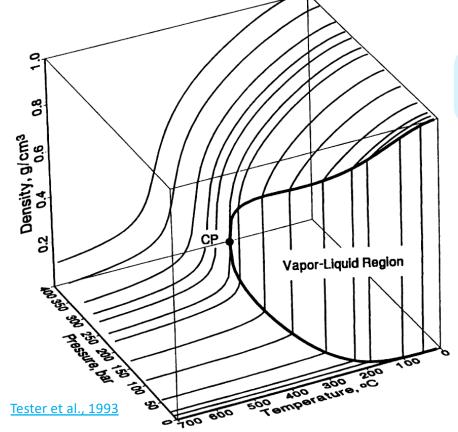


# Super Critical Water Oxidation

Pressure > 22 Mpa / 3,200 psi / 220 bar

Temperature > 374°C

Oxidant (air, peroxide, etc.)



### Hydrothermal Alkaline Treatment

Pressure > 22 Mpa / 3,200 psi / 220 bar

Temperature < 374°C\*

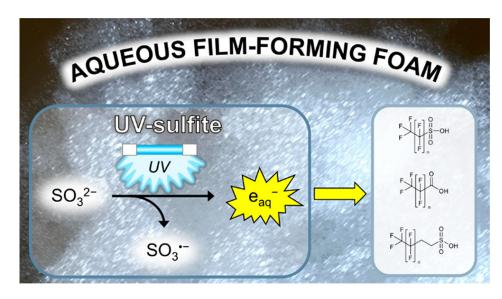
Strongly alkaline pH (~13)

\*High TDS may support a higher temperature while staying in the subcritical region

### **UV-Radiated Sensitizers**



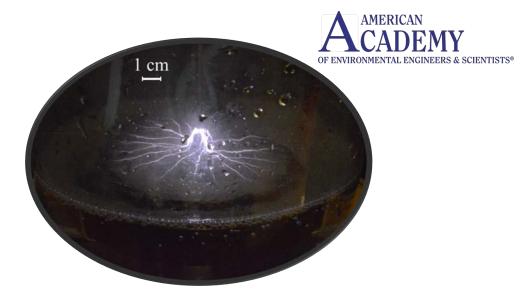
- Mechanism(s): Ultra-violet light (either negative or positive pressure under STP or ozone atmosphere) excites a catalyst (often a reductant) to liberate e<sub>aq</sub>- sequentially defluorinating PFAS (reductants: S<sub>2</sub>O<sub>4</sub><sup>2-</sup>, SO<sub>3</sub><sup>2-</sup>, I<sup>-</sup>, NTA, IAA)
- Some Commercial Vendors: Claros, Enspired Solutions, Moss Parker, Invicta, Water Illumination, Inc., EradiFluor
- Some Concerns: Long residence times, secondary water quality, onsite ozone management



Tenorio et al., 2020

### **Non-Thermal Plasma**

- Mechanism(s): Electrolysis/heat results in ionic plasma species comprised of reactive radicals (OH\*, e<sub>aq</sub>-, H\*, O, HO<sub>2</sub>\*, H<sub>2</sub>, O<sub>2</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>) the subsequently and sequentially defluorinated PFAS
- Some Commercial Vendors: OnVector, DMaxPlasma, PlasmaLeap
- Some Concerns: Long residence times, secondary water quality, some reactor configurations can struggle with short chain PFAS



Stratton et al 2017



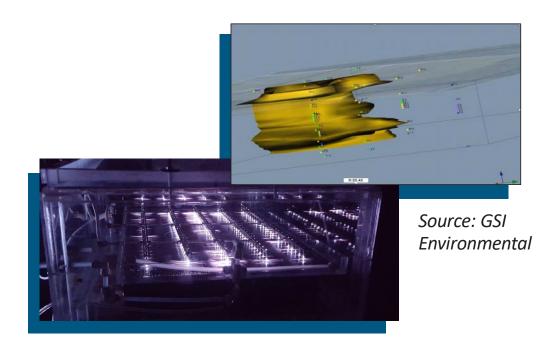
Singh et al., 2019

### Final Thoughts about Human Ingenuity



"Although the problem of PFAS in groundwater appears to be a daunting one, we feel confident that a similar level of ingenuity (invented for previous contaminants) will lead to surprising technical developments in remediating PFAS sites in the future as well"

"Comparing PFAS to other groundwater contaminants: Implications for remediation" Newell et al., 2020



Source: Clarkson University

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### **Need a PDH Certificate?**

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### **Questions?**

Email Marisa Waterman at mwaterman@aaees.org with any questions you may have.

