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Most US Beers Found to Contain PFAS Chemicals Linked to Water Contamination

Study reveals widespread presence of persistent "forever chemicals" in beer, with highest levels in regions facing water pollution issues

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Researchers have found that 95 percent of beers tested in the United States contain per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, chemicals often referred to as “forever chemicals” because they do not break down easily in the environment. The study, published by the American Chemical Society in the journal Environmental Science & Technology, analyzed 23 different beers from across the country. The highest concentrations of PFAS were detected in beers brewed in regions with known water contamination.

The research was led by Jennifer Hoponick Redmon, who said she was motivated by concerns about whether PFAS present in municipal water supplies could end up in beer. The team modified a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency method for testing drinking water to analyze the beer samples. They selected beers produced by local brewers in

areas with documented PFAS contamination, as well as popular domestic and international brands from larger companies whose water sources are not publicly disclosed.

PFAS are synthetic chemicals used for their resistance to water, oil, and stains. They have been widely detected in surface water, groundwater, and municipal water systems throughout the United States and globally. Although breweries typically use filtration and treatment systems for their water, these systems are not designed to remove PFAS.

The study found a strong correlation between PFAS levels in municipal drinking water and those found in locally brewed beer. This connection had not previously been studied in U.S. retail beer. Among the chemicals detected were perfluorooctanesulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), both of which now have established EPA limits for drinking water due to potential health risks.

Beers brewed near the Cape Fear River Basin in North Carolina showed the highest concentrations and most diverse mix of PFAS compounds. This area is already known for significant PFAS pollution in its water supply. The findings suggest that contamination at a single source can spread into widely consumed products like beer.

The presence of PFAS in beer raises concerns for both consumers and brewers. The researchers say their results highlight the need for greater awareness among all parties involved, including regulators. They suggest that breweries may need to consider upgrading their water treatment processes as regulations around PFAS continue to evolve. Municipalities may also need to update their own treatment systems to address these persistent chemicals.

The study was funded by an internal research grant from RTI International. The authors emphasize that while occasional consumption of beer is unlikely to pose immediate health risks, ongoing exposure to PFAS through various sources remains a concern. They hope their findings will encourage further action to reduce PFAS contamination in food and beverages across the country.