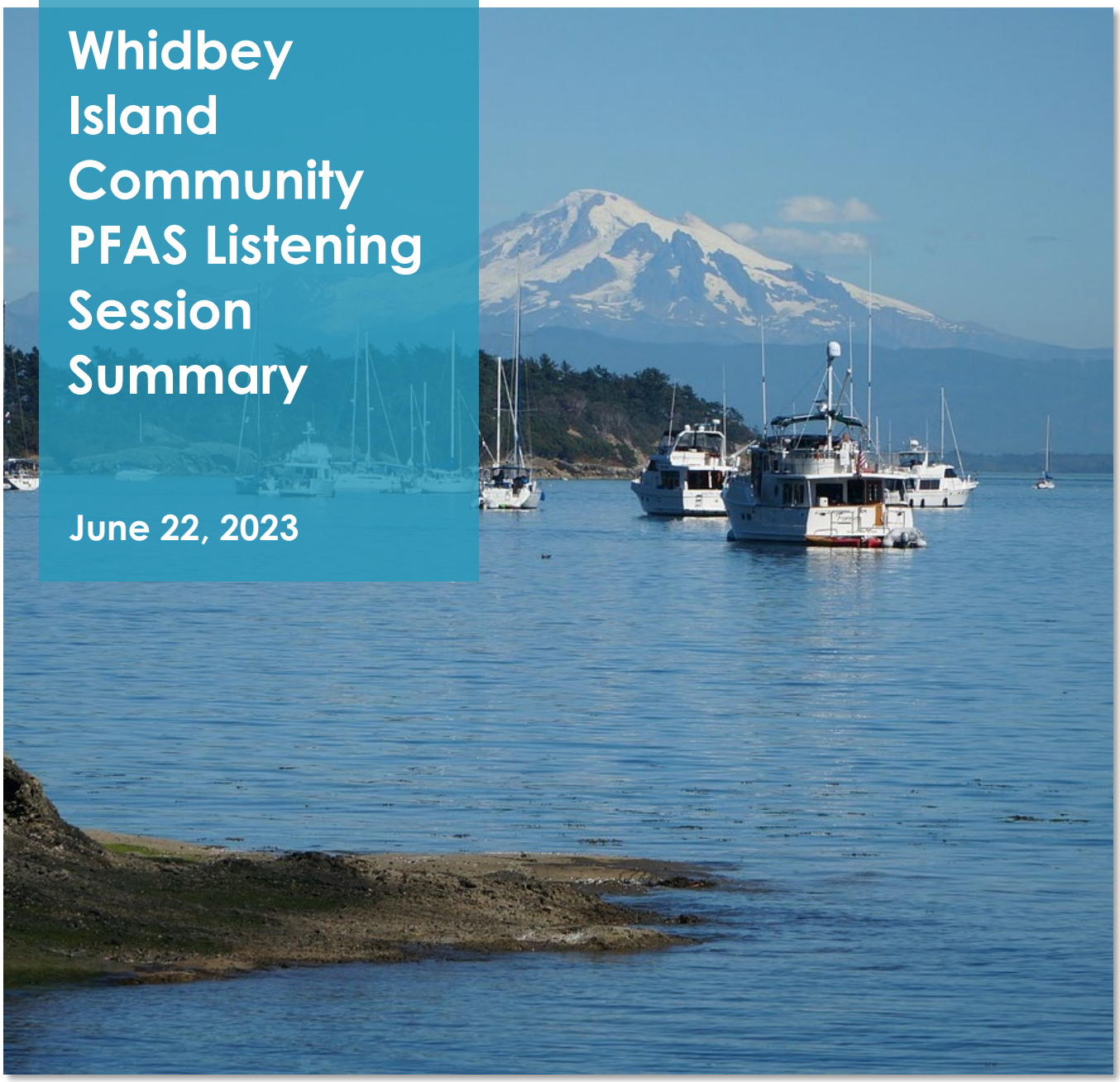
Whidbey Island Community PFAS Listening Session Summary

June 22, 2023



Washington State Department of HEALTH

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This document was created by DOH to support the Whidbey Island/Harrington Lagoon community. The June 22 Whidbey Island Community PFAS Listening Session was a community-run event hosted by the Whidbey Island Water System Association, who invited DOH and other panelists to participate.

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Contents

Listening Session Overview

The Whidbey Island Community Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substance (PFAS) Listening Session was put on by the community-based organization, Whidbey Island Water System Association (WIWSA). John Lovie (Secretary, WIWSA) hosted the session. John invited Island County Public Health, Washington State Department of Health (DOH), and Washington State Department of Ecology (ECY) to be on the guest panel. The meeting was moderated by DOH to support the community. At WIWSA's request, DOH also ran a PFAS Basics Lesson before the listening session for community members who wanted to attend.

The meeting was targeted to the Harrington Lagoon community. Approximately 16 community members attended the meeting. Community members received notice that Harrington Lagoon was designated as a Model Toxics Cleanup Act (MTCA) site by ECY two weeks before the meeting.

The goals of the listening session were to:

1) Get to know local, state, and federal agency representatives working on PFAS issues on Whidbey Island and other places in Washington.
2) Talk about concerns, ask questions, and learn more about efforts to address PFAS, including how we (state agencies, local government agencies, and the community) can work together.
3) Connect with other community members impacted by PFAS in drinking water.
4) Receive up-to-date PFAS health education materials and resources.

The listening session questions were:

1) What questions do you have that are still unanswered?
2) What would you like to work on together going forward?
3) What else do you need us to know?

Health education materials on PFAS in drinking water were available for community members at the meeting.

Session Moderator and PFAS Basics Instructor

- Claire Nitsche (claire.nitsche@doh.wa.gov) – Health Educator, Office of Public Affairs and Equity, Washington State Department of Health

Guest Panel Representatives

Island County Public Health Department:

- Chris Kelley (c.kelley@islandcountywa.gov) – Hydrogeologist

Washington State Department of Health (DOH):

- Barbara Morrissey (barbara.morrissey@doh.wa.gov) – Toxicologist, Office of Environmental Public Health Sciences
- Derek Pell (derek.pell@doh.wa.gov) – Regional Manager, Northwest Regional Office, Office of Drinking Water

Washington State Department of Ecology (ECY):

- Kim Wooten (kim.wooten@ecy.wa.gov) – Toxics Cleanup Program Manager, Toxics Cleanup Program, Northwest Regional Office

PFAS Basics Lesson Information

Several general questions were asked about PFAS chemicals and WA DOH's health advice during the PFAS basics lesson. For information about PFAS, their health impacts, and lowering exposure from drinking water, visit:

- DOH YouTube Channel PFAS Basics Video Playlist
  https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL82Z-swK0-4lg_TJzVodUCt3jOBzp3uUc

- DOH PFAS Webpage with Factsheets
  www.doh.wa.gov/pfas

Question 1: What questions do you have that are still unanswered?

Meeting attendees shared 28 questions with the guest panel. Not all questions could be answered at the meeting. Questions that the panelists didn't have enough information or data to answer were written down so they could elevate those questions to the right people or agency.

See page 9 for a complete transcript of the question and answer session from the meeting.

Question 2: What would you like to work on together going forward?

Meeting attendees shared that they want support accessing resources, pressure on PFAS manufacturers to take responsibility for drinking water contamination, better communication, and to see local government take action to control PFAS in the county. Specifically, attendees asked for the following.

1. **Financial help purchasing water tests and filters.**

   Due to the high cost of PFAS water tests ($400-$700 per test), several meeting attendees with untested wells near Harrington lagoon, shared that the cost was a barrier to testing. Several meeting attendees asked for clearer guidance on what grants or funding opportunities are available to help private well owners and Group B water systems with testing and purchasing filters.

2. **A way to share private well data with Island County Public Health, DOH and ECY.**

   Many meeting attendees shared they wanted to help with ECY's investigation. They asked if they could send private well test results to Island County Public Health, DOH, and ECY.

3. **More specific information on PFAS health impacts.**

   Many meeting attendees shared that they live in Harrington Lagoon part time, and rent their properties out while they are not there. As the State Action Level (SAL) guidelines are for people who drink and cook with contaminated water every day, several meeting attendees shared that they were not sure how to interpret our SALs for part-time residents.

4. **Pressure on PFAS manufacturers to pay for cleanup and damages.**

   One meeting attendee shared that they "want to see the state put pressure directly on PFAS manufacturers" to help with PFAS remediation in water and soil. Meeting attendees were told about the lawsuit our attorney general recently filed against 3M, Dupont, and 18 other manufacturers of AFFF firefighting foam to sue for damages and cleanup.

5. **Better communication about PFAS in Harrington Lagoon.**

   Meeting attendees expressed frustration about only receiving notice for the listening session through postcards, as many only live in Harrington Lagoon part time. Several meeting attendees said they only heard about the meeting through friends. They asked panelists to use different forms of communication for outreach. Ideas included:

   - Social media
   - Digital newsletters
   - Newspaper announcements

Question 3: What else do you need us to know?

Meeting attendees shared the following thoughts and concerns with agency guest panelists.

1. **Digital communications are the best way to reach community members.**

   Many community members shared they only live in Harrington Lagoon part-time. Because of this, meeting attendees recommended using digital communications, like email listservs, to send updates about meetings and site news.

2. **Gratitude to the panelists for attending the listening session.**

   Several meeting attendees thanked panelists for coming to the listening session. They found the session very helpful and appreciated the chance to meet and connect with panelists.

Actions Agencies Are Taking Based On Community Feedback

Based on community feedback, guest panelists from Island County Public Health, ECY,' and DOH are working on the following actions:

1. **DOH, ECY and Island County Public Health confirmed how private well owners can share PFAS test results with ECY and Island County Public Health.**

   All results received by ECY are a public record, and can't be kept confidential if we get a public records request. If you're okay with that, either send data to PFASNorthwest@ecy.wa.gov or submit to ERTS at https://ecology.wa.gov/footer-pages/report-an-environmental-issue. If you have questions about public records, reach out to ECY via email Kim Wooten at kim.wooten@ecy.wa.gov or 425-324-1658.

   Test results can also be shared directly with Chris Kelley at Island County Public Health via email at c.kelley@islandcountywa.gov.

   DOH is exploring options for adding private well results to the PFAS Water Testing Dashboard.

2. **DOH and ECY are exploring options for a digital newsletter with updates on the PFAS investigation.**

   One possible location for the updates is the Harrington Lagoon Ecology site webpage at https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/cleanupsearch/site/16780.

3. **Looking for ways to support communities break down barriers to purchasing water tests and water filters.**

   DOH has brand new funding called the Alternative Water Supply Grant that can help individual well owners and Group B water systems fund PFAS water testing and purchase PFAS water filters. Some of the details are still being worked out, but counties can apply to DOH for eligible projects. Island County Public Health has not yet developed a proposal for funding through the Alternative Water Supply Grant.

4. **Developing new education materials about PFAS.**

   Topics include step-by-step actions for private well owners if they find PFAS, best practices for septic tanks, information on how to shop for PFAS free products, and how to best care for products that do contain PFAS.

   Some of this information is available at https://pfascentral.org/pfas-free-products/.

Questions and Answers

Q: What does the lifetime limit mean and how does it relate to Harrington Lagoon?

The state and federal health advisories for individual PFAS chemicals were set to keep people healthy over a lifetime of exposure in drinking water. They also protect sensitive groups like infants, young children and babies in the womb from exposure to PFAS in drinking water during shorter, sensitive periods of a child's development.

The perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS) levels in Harrington Lagoon's water supply are well above state and federal recommendations for long-term safety, and for sensitive groups. PFOS is one of the most common types of PFAS chemicals found in the environment.

Q: How does PFAS exposure relate to health risks?

It's important to know that some PFAS chemicals, like PFOS and PFOA, accumulate in our bodies overtime. This is because our bodies are good at absorbing them and slow at clearing them out of our system. As you drink multiple glasses of water over months and years, these PFAS chemicals will build up in your body. The higher the levels of these PFAS chemicals in your water, the faster they will build up to a level of concern in your body. The opposite is also true, though! When you remove the source of PFAS exposure – such as by filtering PFAS out of your water – the levels in your body will slowly start to go down.

Your exposure depends on how much water you drink, and how often you drink it. For Harrington Lagoon:

- If your home is a vacation home and you don't live there year-round, your exposure will be lower than if you are drinking the water regularly.
- If you already filter your water, or drink mostly bottled beverages rather than tap water, you may have lower exposure.
- If you regularly drink a lot of tap water from the contaminated well, your exposure may be higher.
- If you mix infant formula with tap water, or have children in the household, their exposure may be higher.

We (DOH) are still learning about the how PFAS affect people. But, we have enough information to take action to protect people's health. The state and federal health advice used exposure models to estimate the level of PFAS that can be in daily drinking water without any increase in negative health effects.

Q: How many years would you need to drink the water at the level it is at before your health risk increases?

We (DOH) don't know enough yet to predict when an individual person's health risk might increase in response to a specific PFAS exposure level. This is because individuals may vary widely in how susceptible they are to PFAS associated health risks. We think the most susceptible groups are babies in the womb and children under 5 years old. These early periods in a child's life, where organs and systems like the immune system are developing are especially vulnerable to disruption by the types of toxicity associated with PFAS. Young children also drink more water pound for pound than adults, so they often have higher exposure to contaminants in tap water than adults in same household.

We (DOH) could use the exposure model we used to set our State Action Levels to help answer this question for the community as a whole using average water consumptions rates. However, we hestitate to do that because the EPA just released new science on PFAS. EPA's new assessments for PFOA and PFOS lower the exposure level linked to increased risk (in some portion of the population) for kidney cancer, immune effects and reduced birthweights. The new numbers indicate that even typical background levels of exposure in the U.S. residents are of potential health concern. Because of this, the current advice is to lower exposure to PFOS and PFOA as much as possible.

Q: If you are drinking water exactly at the EPA's maximum contaminant level (MCL) would it be safe to drink for your lifetime?

In general, yes. But, there is some nuance. The EPA also considers how feasible their limit is for water systems to follow, and weighs the cost and benefits of treating a contaminant when they set an MCL. Their proposed goals for ensuring long term safety of PFOS and PFOA in drinking water were actually below the level we can detect in drinking water. EPA set their proposed MCLs as low as feasibly possible, meaning as low as labs are currently able to detect.
If your PFAS levels are above our (Washington State) SAL, you should try to lower your exposure. When EPA adopts MCLs for PFAS, those will replace our SALs has the action level.

Q: Do you have stats like this for Deer Lake area?

Yes, the PFAS levels in Deer Lake's wells are lower than the levels at Harrington Lagoon. None of the PFAS results exceed the SALs right now. There may be higher levels nearby, so the water system will continue to monitor. We shared results and resources since there are other wells in the area and people may be interested in the results from Deer Lake and in testing for PFAS. Visit the Washington Tracking Network PFAS Testing Results Dashboard at https://doh.wa.gov/data-and-statistical-reports/washington-tracking-network-wtn/pfas/dashboard to see results for Deer Lake and other water systems.

Q: Has Deer Lake been tested and is it safe?

Yes. Deer Lake Estates tested their well. Their levels are below the SALs and the proposed EPA MCLs.

Q: Where did this stuff come from and why do those up above closer to the airfield not have problems, except stuff 4-5 years old?

We (ECY) think it may be a new site since there is a gap between sites. If we get more info that shows the contamination is related to Navy we will combine the sites, but right now looks new. Residential area, ruling out some commercial areas, but there could have been training decades ago. Will not name a source until more info, which may take us some time.

Our state's PFAS water testing requirements were passed by the State Board of Health (SBOH) in 2021, so they are fairly new. With the requirements, Group A community and non-community water systems have until December 31, 2025 to complete their first round of testing.

DOH developed a PFAS dashboard which has all results from required drinking water testing by public water systems. It is easy to access and has an interactive map. You can see the ongoing monitoring results of PFAS testing at any public water system at:

https://doh.wa.gov/data-and-statistical-reports/washington-tracking-network-wtn/pfas

Q: For the results you showed on the PFAS Basics slide, what well was that tested from?

The results were from Harrington Lagoon data from three sampling dates:

- January 2022
- March 2022
- January 2023

You can see a bit of change over time for what concentrations were found. The data are also available at DOH website at the link above.

Q: What other wells have been tested?

See answer above.

Q: This seems premature, we have one that has been tested, but we haven't tested all of the systems. WA clean up process under MTCA is fine for a mill or industry, but what are you going to clean up? Why are we doing this now, it seems early?

We (ECY) are at the first step in the process. Getting more data is the next step. The Model Toxics Cleanup Act (MTCA) does not come with a timeline. We like to have the person who polluted pay for the cleanup, but need to get data to determine who the polluter is. We also need to figure out where the contamination plume is and then work on clean up.

Q: What is that identification and cleanup process?

The first step is more sampling to determine where contamination is. Sampling can include soil and groundwater from either drinking water wells or groundwater monitoring wells. The second step is to investigate clean up options. Then, we (ECY) can start cleanup.

Q: How long will the identification and cleanup process take? 1-5 years?

It varies a lot depending on factors – how complex the site, what media is impacted (ground, surface), permits involved, how many resources the person responsible for the cleanup has, etc. We (ECY) don't have a good guess for what that will look like here because we (ECY) don't know how complex it is until we get more data. However, it can take much longer than 5 years.

Q: If the happy path is 5 years and super long 10? 20? What is the range?

There aren't timelines in MTCA for each step. In "active cleanup mode," everything can happen quickly. However, we (ECY) also have some sites in our books that are 20 years old, and cleanup hasn't happened.

Q: How much does it cost to test a private well?

There's a price range in what the labs charge. We (DOH, ECY) have heard $400-$700 per test from community members, but it varies by lab.

We (DOH) have a list of accredited labs on our website site (www.doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-09/331-700.pdf). We encourage you to use a lab accredited by ECY if you get a water test. The closest lab to here is Anatek Labs in ID, so shipping costs may be lower.

Q: How long does it take to get private well water test results?

That's a great question to ask when doing your research on which lab to use. We (DOH, ECY) have heard from private well owners that it varies. It can be anywhere from 2 to 6 weeks. We (DOH) have a list of accredited labs that includes the labs' phone numbers (www.doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-09/331-700.pdf). Please be aware, the lab is measuring results in parts per trillion (ppt), which is very small! Because of that, the protocol for taking the test is very important – such as how you are collecting the sample and not wearing certain types of clothing while you're doing it. The lab will send a kit with careful instructions – follow them exactly as they are written.

Q: Are you assuming everyone with a private well will spent $600 on a test?

No, we (DOH) are not. We understand the cost is a barrier to following our health advice.

The Washington State Legislature recently allocated limited funding for sampling and alternative water supplies for Group B systems and private wells. DOH is working out how to distribute these funds, and how we do that may evolve over time. We have those funds starting July 1, 2023. Right now, this funding is accessible through local health jurisdictions who apply for it from DOH, and other eligible parties (like local 501c3 non-profits).

Q: I'm still wondering about MTCA because it is to clean up industrial sites. If the main site is Navy base, how will you do the clean up? If it is already in the groundwater and spread out, what would you do?

Great question. MTCA actually applies to sites of any size, not just industrial sites! We (ECY) work with a lot of gas stations with underlying leaking tanks or dry cleaners. We want to get the stuff out of there to protect people and the plants and animals in the area.

No matter what the site is for PFAS, the cleanup is filtration. We (ECY) can pump out groundwater, filter it, and put back it back in the ground. There aren't great options for soil. There are lots of great technologies that universities are studying that may be options in the next few years to break down PFAS on site without removing the groundwater.

Q: For groundwater monitoring wells, can you put those in now at suspected locations?

We (ECY) see groundwater monitoring wells at all kinds of cleanup sites. We work a lot in city areas that don't have drinking water wells because the groundwater isn't used for drinking water. We can put in targeted wells to check groundwater at different levels. We can also put them in when need those questions answered.

Q: Any plans for more sampling?

No, we (ECY) don't know who will do next round of sampling. It is up to whoever that is on what additional sampling is needed, but because we don't know the source, we don't who should step in next. Unfortunately, ECY is not set up to do that work and then get reimbursed.

ECY does have some grant funding that we give to municipalities to do investigation or cleanup. This grant funding comes through the state budget, so the next opportunity would be to apply for a grant in early 2024 to receive funding in the 2025-2027 biennium.

More about these grants:

- Area-Wide Groundwater Investigation Grant: https://ecology.wa.gov/about-us/payments-contracts-grants/grants-loans/find-a-grant-or-loan/area-wide-groundwater-investigation-grants

- Oversight Remedial Action Grant: https://ecology.wa.gov/about-us/payments-contracts-grants/grants-loans/find-a-grant-or-loan/oversight-remedial-action-grants-loans

Q: How much does it cost to drill a new well?

That's not easy or straightforward to answer. The cost depends on depth and location of the well. Some wells are $5-10k, but it can go up to $100k. So, there's a very large spectrum. The big issue is getting drillers. The demand is huge, and there isn't enough equipment, whether it is one well or five.

Island County has a lot of private wells. There are a huge number of sampling sites that are preconstructed, and we need to sample as many as possible.

There is a Wide Investigation Grant with money available, but not until the 2025-2027 biennium. This money is available for counties to apply for.

Q: How deep is the well that was tested for Harrington Lagoon?

The well that was tested for Harrington Lagoon is 81 feet.

A meeting participant shared that their well is deeper, and that others at higher elevation are running dry.

Q: Is it one big aquifer under the island or pockets of water?

Great question. Picture a layer cake – cake, frosting, cake, frosting. The frosting is the target aquifer layer. Could drill 10' to get to water, or 30' to get water. Neighbors drill at different depths. We (Island County Public Health) call it an "island wide" aquifer, but the aquifers don't span the entire island. Instead, it's thought of as 5 water bearing zones, with some that are more connected and some that are disconnected.

Q: If we dug another 80' would we find another aquifer that isn't contaminated?

Yes and no. Another issue on Whidbey is seawater intrusion, so deeper you go the more likely you'll experience sea water intrusion. This is especially true on the edges of the island. There is a narrow range to get freshwater.

Q: What about the dump near us, is that a potential source?

Possibly! In general, landfills are on the list of where people are looking and seeing PFAS. PFAS chemicals have been in consumer products since 1950s, so when they end up in unlined landfills they can leach. Newer landfills have more barriers, so leaching is less likely. Also unregulated sites in low spots. Don't know details of this particular landfill

Q: Have you looked into including the dump?

Yes, that is a logical place to include in sampling.

Q: Is there a date where landfills started to have requirements about PFAS?

I (Kim Wooten, ECY) only know a little bit about landfill regulations. I know that some liner requirements are newer. They are finding PFAS in leachate coming out of lined landfill in King County. We (the panel) can look into this and share more information.

Q: Does anyone know when we switched from landfill to transfer station?

We (the panel) aren't sure. The landfill that is here is lined and the location is now a transfer station. All garbage goes off island. We (Island County) no longer have an active landfill.

Kim followed up on this after the meeting. This is what she learned:

The Coupeville Landfill had a few different areas that accepted different kinds of waste, including municipal solid waste (household trash) and construction debris. These areas accepted waste at various times between 1946 to 2002, which is during the time period where PFAS were in products that could have been disposed in the landfill. Based on when the landfill was constructed, it does not have a bottom liner. The landfill does do regular groundwater sampling from monitoring wells for other chemicals, but has not yet included PFAS in their sampling.

Q: You said there are new sites separate from naval base. Which sites are those?

The new sites on Whidbey are Harrington Lagoon and Deer Lake. Deer Lake's levels are below the SALs. The third site is Mabana Shores on Camano Island. Mabana's levels are also below the SALs.


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