



# Technical Assistance Services *for Communities* Hoosick Falls, New York Technical Assistance Needs Assessment

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## **Technical Assistance Needs Assessment (TANA) Hoosick Falls, New York**

In October 2017, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in coordination with New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) and New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH), asked the Technical Assistance Services for Communities (TASC) program to conduct a Technical Assistance Needs Assessment (TANA) in Hoosick Falls, New York. The purpose of a TANA is to identify whether a community requires additional support to understand technical information and enable meaningful community involvement in the Superfund decision-making process. TANA discussions are held with members of the community to ask for their views on how the community is receiving technical information about a site; whether the community needs additional assistance to understand and respond to site-related technical information; and whether there are organizations in the community that are interested or involved in site-related issues and capable of acting as an appropriate conduit for technical assistance services. TANAs provide a snapshot of the community's needs. Additional needs may arise over time and as the site status changes.

Outreach and publicity efforts for this TANA included:

- TANA presentation and sign-up for participation at the November 14, 2017 Hoosick Falls Village Board Meeting.
- A notice to all Village residents and other residents on the municipal water line was included in the Village letter included in the December 2017 Village water bill.
- Supervisor Mark Surdam announcing the TANA at the January 2018 Town Board Meeting.

Hoosick Falls, New York - TANA

- Word of mouth – each person who participated was asked about others who might be interested in participating in the TANA. It was also discussed at additional Town and Village board meetings and separate meetings with agency personnel that occurred during this period.

This TANA is funded by EPA’s TASC program. Its contents do not necessarily reflect the policies, actions or positions of EPA, NYSDEC, or NYSDOH.

Information in this report has been compiled from the November 14, 2017 Hoosick Falls Village Board Meeting, discussions with staff from EPA, NYSDEC and NYSDOH, and conversations with the community members and interested parties listed below that took place between November 2017 and May 2018.

- Anne Rabe
- Cathy Dawson
- Connie Plouffe
- Dave Lukas
- David Bond
- Don Granger
- Howard Freed
- Jennifer Plouffe
- Kenny Bugbee
- Liz Moran
- Loreen Hackett
- Marion Stevens
- Mayor Rob Allen, Village of Hoosick Falls
- Michele Baker
- Michelle O’Leary
- Patience Dougherty
- Silvia Potter
- Supervisor Mark Surdam, Town of Hoosick
- Trustee Brian Bushner, Village of Hoosick Falls

In July 2018, individuals who participated in the TANA were asked to review the draft TANA for accuracy and to ensure that the community feedback section reflects the perspectives shared. The TANA was revised and finalized after receiving comments on the draft document.

The TANA has four sections:

1. Background Information
2. Community Feedback
3. Information Resources
4. Recommendations

Hoosick Falls, New York - TANA

## **Section 1: Background Information**

In late 2014, perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) was detected in the Village of Hoosick Falls public drinking water supply wells at levels higher than the recommended EPA advisory level. PFOA is a manmade chemical that is toxic and persistent in the environment. It is used in a variety of products to resist heat and to repel oil, grease, stains, and water. It is also used to make Teflon. Manufacturing processes with Teflon have occurred in multiple locations in and near the Village for over 50 years. PFOA is in a class of chemicals called per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). PFOA and perfluorooctyl sulfonate (PFOS) are the most studied chemicals in this class of chemicals.

In early 2016, a temporary granular activated carbon (GAC) filtration system was installed to remove PFOA from the Village of Hoosick Falls' municipal water system. A permanent GAC system has been active since early 2017. PFOA was also identified in private wells mostly located in the Town of Hoosick (outside of the Village). Over 800 point-of-entry treatment (POET) systems have been installed to address concerns with PFOA in private wells. Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics and Honeywell International have been identified as responsible parties for the contamination.

In September 2016, EPA proposed listing the Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics facility, located at 14 McCaffrey Street, on the National Priorities List (NPL), a list of the most serious sites identified for long-term cleanup under the federal Superfund program. In the summer of 2017, EPA finalized the site's listing on the NPL. NYSDEC has taken the lead for this site, in consultation with NYSDOH. EPA is a support agency. NYSDEC, NYSDOH and EPA Region 2 are working with residents to promote an understanding of the Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics – McCaffrey Street site's contamination, status and cleanup process. The site is currently in the remedial investigation stage of the Superfund process (to determine the nature and the extent of the contamination and the risk posed by this contamination to public health and the environment). This TANA specifically addresses this site.

NYSDEC has also entered into a series of Consent Orders and is overseeing work to address the Saint-Gobain Liberty Street site, the Oak Materials (River Road) site, the Former Oak Materials (John Street) site, the Hoosick Falls Landfill, the Allied-Signal Laminate Systems - Mechanic Street site and the Former Oak-Mitsui - First Street site. These are also sites that may affect the Hoosick Falls community, and there may be additional information needs related to these sites.

## Section 2: Community Feedback

The people who participated in this needs assessment provided the following input.

### General Needs and Concerns

#### *Communication Needs*

- Many people expressed appreciation for the opportunity to discuss their concerns during the TANA discussions, as well as for the past work of EPA, NYSDEC, and NYSDOH.
- People would like answers to their questions about the status of the site and expectations for moving forward with the Superfund process.
- Some community members are confused and concerned about the status, plans and results of the blood biomonitoring program that NYSDOH initiated in 2016, and they would like more information in plain language.<sup>1</sup>
- Many people feel they have not received much information about the site in the past year.
- Many people are concerned about the flow of information. Some respondents expressed their belief that all parties that are interested in receiving information have not been receiving information at the same time and notification of drinking water contamination in 2015 and 2016 was not adequate. They noted that some people unknowingly continued to drink contaminated water for months after others had been notified to not drink the water. It was suggested that mailings may have been received by property owners and not renters.
- A few people have the impression that there is more openness and dialogue between the involved agencies and community members in Bennington, Vermont, than in Hoosick Falls, and they would like to see communication between the agencies and community improved here.

#### *Technical Concerns*

- Community members would like answers to questions about reliability of water filtration systems, remediation technologies, and health effects of PFOA.
- Many people have been keeping up to date on the progress in cleaning up PFOA contamination in Bennington, Vermont, and would like to see the same progress in Hoosick Falls.
- Community members want a clean drinking water source that would be accessible by a water line for Hoosick Falls.
- Community members are concerned that the cleanup is going to take a very long time.

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<sup>1</sup> The second round of blood testing was initiated in late June 2018.

## Specific Needs, Questions and Concerns

### *Information Needs*

- Some people expressed frustration that information provided to the public has not been available in an easily understood format. One person said that some information resources have been incomplete, incorrect and confusing. One person suggested larger font in informational material so that it is also readable for the elderly population.
- Several people said that a lack of transparency is a problem. One person shared the perception that decisions about the site are being made behind closed doors.
- One person said the community needs technical assistance with reading and understanding large documents.
- Many people suggested creating a centralized website where people can access all site information. One person noted that the agencies have agreed to provide such a website.
- Some people said that not everyone in the community has access to the Internet and they need information to be shared by mail or during meetings. One person suggested holding meetings every two to three months to provide regular site updates. Another person suggested a quarterly newsletter.
- One person said that private well owners did not receive a letter or advice and had to contact the State on their own to have their water tested.
- One person recommended quarterly emails to update the community.
- Some people noted that some information has been hard to find. This information includes the location of the site repository, the citizen participation plan, agency contacts for the site and when public comments will be requested.<sup>2</sup>

### *Questions about the Cleanup Process*

- What are the stages of the Superfund process and where is the site in the process?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of each of the agencies involved?
- What is EPA's role?
- What is the cleanup process?
- How deep is the soil sampling?
- What type of remediation can be done?

### *Questions and Concerns about Drinking Water Safety*

- Was the water system flushed before it was safe to use?
- Can PFOA build up on calcium deposits in pipes?
- Is there PFOA in my hot water tank?

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<sup>2</sup> The site repository and a list of agency contacts are located in the Village Office and the Cheney Library in Hoosick Falls. Many of these files are also located on the Village webpage.

- Water lines on Snow Street have not been replaced. Does sediment in water lines recontaminate water?
- What about other groundwater contaminants from the current sites?
- What changed from the time people were told the water was not safe until when they were told that it is safe?
- How can I get my water tested?
- One person heard that spikes in PFOA in the current drinking water system have not been acknowledged and people have not been warned about them. The agencies have stated that there have been no PFOA spikes in finished water since treatment began.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Concerns about Water Treatment Systems*

- Some people said that restricted water flow by the regulators on the POET systems inconveniences users.
- A few people expressed a lack of trust in the water filtration systems and lack of trust in oversight and verification that the systems are working.
- One person expressed frustration about being given a POET system instead of being hooked up to municipal water.
- One person expressed concern that the carbon filters are not being checked frequently enough on POET systems, which could result in drinking contaminated water in between the planned maintenance times.

#### *Questions about Activity Safety*

- Is it safe to fish?
- Is it safe to garden – where is the evidence for this site, regarding specific contaminants and specific fruits and vegetables?

#### *Cleanup-Specific Concerns*

- A few people expressed concern that nothing will get cleaned up because of political issues and reductions in agency staff, regulations, research institute funding and general funding limitations.
- There is concern about whether there are any methods available to clean up the magnitude of the contamination in Hoosick Falls and the contaminants present in groundwater.
- One person expressed concern that the responsible parties cannot be held financially responsible over the long term (100 years).

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<sup>3</sup> Per the NYSDEC/NYSDOH, since the time the temporary and permanent granular activated carbon (GAC) systems have been in service at the Hoosick Falls Municipal Water Treatment Plant, the finished water has been free of PFOA. There have not been any spikes of PFOA in the finished water.

- Several people said they believe that cleanup is not possible and that the only solution is to find a new source of drinking water.
- Some people asked about how McCaffrey Street will be cleaned up.

#### *Property Value Concerns*

- A few people expressed concern about the potential for lower property values due to the contamination.
- People shared concerns about the stigma associated with previous contamination in the municipal water system and in private wells.

#### *Health Concerns*

- Some people expressed concern about potential health effects from additional unregulated contaminants in groundwater.
- Some people asked if blood will be tested again and what that means for people's health. (This was asked before the second round of blood sampling began in late June 2018.)
- Some people expressed fear of cancer from exposures.
- Two people commented that long-term effects of exposure to high levels of PFOA are unknown and people's health needs to be monitored over the long term.
- A few people discussed the need for NYSDOH to educate physicians about monitoring and managing the health of people exposed to PFOA.
- Many people discussed their concerns about how NYSDOH blood sampling was conducted and how long it took until blood results were released. They also discussed the fear they felt when they received their results without a clear understanding of the intent of the sampling or the meaning of the results.

#### Relationship with Agencies

##### *EPA*

Several people expressed confidence in EPA and appreciation that EPA is now involved in the investigation at the McCaffrey Street site. Many shared their appreciation of the soil sampling conducted by EPA. Some people asked about EPA's role and how its involvement changes the cleanup. A few people wondered whether changes in EPA's administration would impact the ability of EPA to adequately assist the community. One person said that the community is looking to EPA to lower maximum contaminant levels for PFOA to the recommended limits in the recently released Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry report.

##### *NYSDEC*

Confidence in NYSDEC appears to be mixed. Some people are confident that the State is doing a good job. Others expressed distrust of NYSDEC, in particular, and distrust of the State in

Hoosick Falls, New York - TANA

general. Some people shared their appreciation of the communication and availability of NYSDEC employees. Others felt that NYSDEC's communication was poor. Some people are concerned that the State is not paying enough attention to them because they are a small town on the Vermont border. They feel that if they lived in a more populated area, they would be heard more. One person noted that a clean water source is being diligently investigated and indicated that the community expects more updates on this topic in the fall.

### *NYSDOH*

Several people expressed a distrust of NYSDOH. People were generally concerned about the level of PFOA in their blood, as indicated by NYSDOH's blood tests. Many people asked about the meaning of the results and next steps that should be taken for their health. These topics are very personal. Participants indicated they would like interactions with NYSDOH to be handled with care. One person said that issues related to NYSDOH have been corrected and are no longer of concern.

### Community-Based Group Formation

About half of the people expressed interest in the formation of a community-based group. The purpose of this group would be for information sharing and to allow the community to provide input to the agencies on decisions being made, where possible. Some people indicated this was an urgent or high-priority need. One person recommended having a group with 10 members. One person said that group members should live in the area and not include state representatives or people swayed by politics. One person said that EPA and state representatives have already agreed to form a community-based group. Several people had specific recommendations regarding their interest in being part of the group or about other potential group members.

Some participants suggested resources that could be beneficial for a community group. These include:

- Activities at Bennington College (in Bennington, Vermont) related to PFOA contamination.
- Collaboration with impacted residents in Petersburg, New York, and Bennington, Vermont, to share information.
- Dr. David Carpenter, a professor in the School of Public Health at the University at Albany, who contacted TASC to offer his assistance to any groups or people who would like it. His research includes looking at health effects of perfluorinated compounds. He has experience working with communities.

### Community Information Resources

Community members who participated in this needs assessment shared the following resources and ways the community receives information:

Hoosick Falls, New York - TANA

- Facebook and Twitter
- Village Board Meetings
- Town Board Meetings
- DEC and DOH representatives available at almost every monthly board meeting
- The *Bennington Banner* newspaper
- *The Eagle* newspaper (Cambridge, New York)
- The *Eastwick Press* newspaper
- The *Times Union* newspaper (Albany, New York)
- Word of mouth from friends and associates
- Online research
- Assistance from members of groups not based in Hoosick Falls

### **Section 3: Information Resources**

This section includes websites and resources related to the Hoosick Falls sites and issues for the community's reference.

#### Local, State and Federal Resources

- Hoosick Falls Municipal Water: <http://www.villageofhoosickfalls.com/Water>
- NYSDEC: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/108791.html>
- NYSDOH: <https://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/investigations/hoosick>
  - Water Quality Hotline: 800-801-8092 (Monday – Friday, 8:30 am – 4:30 pm)
- EPA: <https://www.epa.gov/superfund/saint-gobain-performance-plastics>

#### Resources about PFOA

- EPA Drinking Water Health Advisories for PFOA and PFOS: <https://www.epa.gov/ground-water-and-drinking-water/drinking-water-health-advisories-pfoa-and-pfos>
- PFAS information page (NYSDEC): <https://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/108831.html>
- PFAS in Drinking Water information page (Vermont Department of Health): <http://www.healthvermont.gov/environment/drinking-water/perfluoroalkyl-and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances-pfas-drinking-water>
- Understanding PFOA website (Bennington College): <http://www.bennington.edu/center-advancement-of-public-action/environment-and-public-action/understanding-pfoa>

#### Other Resources

- PFOA in our water: <https://www.facebook.com/PFOA-in-Hoosick-Falls-745234358894959>
- Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics - Hoosick Water site: <http://www.hoosickwater.com>

## Section 4: Recommendations

This section describes recommendations for technical assistance and improved communication based on the information received from people who participated in this needs assessment. As described below, some of these recommendations could both address technical assistance needs and improve communication. These recommendations could be fulfilled by EPA and/or NYSDEC and NYSDOH, with support from technical assistance programs where appropriate.

### Technical Assistance

People in Hoosick Falls continue to have technical questions and needs. Areas where the community might benefit from short- or long-term technical assistance are listed below.

1. Provide support to form a community-based group to help identify additional community questions and provide information about state or federal resources/programs that are available to the community to assist them in hiring a technical advisor to answer them. Several community members had technical questions related to the Hoosick Falls sites. For example, what types of remediation technologies are possible, how can the effectiveness of filtration systems be verified, and can PFOA breakthroughs be detected and prevented? Such a group could help ensure that all stakeholders get their questions answered. A community organization that is representative of all stakeholders impacted by the cleanup does not currently exist in Hoosick Falls.
2. Host meetings/workshops/information sessions and provide fact sheets to help address community questions. The meetings/workshops/information sessions could be organized through a community-based group (see above) or planned separately. The meetings/workshops/information sessions and fact sheets could address the key items below and other topics as identified by the community. All information should be provided in a clear, understandable format, using visuals and larger font as much as possible.
  - a. Help the community understand the decision-making process regarding the provision of an alternative future water supply. There is clear community interest, and an expectation, that an alternative water supply will be provided. Providing more information and addressing this expectation would be helpful.
  - b. Help the community understand the site agencies' roles and responsibilities. The community would benefit from more information and clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of site agencies – EPA, NYSDEC and NYSDOH – especially since the McCaffrey Street site's listing on the NPL. Helping people understand the agencies' roles and responsibilities would be helpful.

- c. Provide technical assistance regarding the potential health impacts of PFOA. The community would appreciate more information regarding the potential health impacts of PFOA levels in their blood and the future process for monitoring those levels. Because this is a relatively new area of study, with a limited amount of peer-reviewed research available, it is even more important to help people understand what is known, so that they can make more informed decisions.
- d. Provide information and guidance on how safe it is to work in the soils in their yard or grow gardens for food. Several community members raised questions about this. Working with community members to address their concern and providing the community with guidance on this issue would be useful.

### Communication

People in Hoosick Falls get their information from a wide variety of sources. Access to online information seems to be highly variable within the community. Opportunities to enhance site-related communication with the community are listed below.

1. Provide support to form a community-based group to foster communication with EPA, NYSDEC and NYSDOH, and to help share accurate information broadly across the community. Such a group should be inclusive of all stakeholders, and group members should agree on the group's role, expectations and organizational structure.
2. Communicate frequently using a variety of methods. Post frequent, succinct status updates across multiple media – such as agency websites, local newspapers, the Town and Village's webpage, and email blasts for interested parties. This will help people receive notifications of site-related activities and stay informed over time. This could be coordinated with a bi-annual newsletter mailed out to physical addresses (including apartments) and posted online. Information should be in large font and plain language, and supported by maps, figures and diagrams as much as possible.

Potential topics include:

- Announcements of upcoming site-related events or activities.
- Announcements of upcoming blood-testing events and plans.
- Plain language explanations of blood-testing results.
- Plain language updates on the safety of drinking water for all community members, including children.
- Plain language updates about routine monitoring and verification that the filtration systems are working.
- Plain language updates on PFOA regulations and health advisories.
- Contact information for questions on all topics.

- Location of hard copy and online informational resources.
3. Work with the Town and Village to provide a centralized online forum where people can get site status updates and find links to available information. Many people in Hoosick Falls are looking for more site-related information. Having a single Internet location with links to additional information can help people find answers to their questions and track data. It would be helpful if this website served as a repository of site data and included information on agencies' responsibilities as well as status updates and activity schedules for all investigations and cleanups at the Hoosick Falls sites.

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