

## ***Webinar Highlights***

### **PFAS in Locally Caught Fish**

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Per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), commonly known as “forever chemicals,” can be found in soil and water, in fish, and in our bodies. PFAS are associated with human health harms, including cancer, heart disease, birth defects, liver disease, and decreased immunity. Rural and Indigenous communities, relying on freshwater fish as part of their traditional diet and culture, can be at higher risk from these health threats.

In this webinar, CHE-Alaska hosted the Environmental Working Group’s (EWG) **Dr. Tasha Stoiber** and ACAT’s **Dr. Samarys Seguinot-Medina** to discuss PFAS contamination in freshwater fish, and how it represents an environmental justice issue for communities that depend on locally caught fish for sustenance and traditional cultural practices. Dr. Stoiber presented a recent study on PFAS contamination in freshwater fish across the country. Dr. Seguinot-Medina discussed PFAS contamination and related legislation specific to Alaska.

**Featured Speakers:** Dr. Tasha Stoiber, Senior Scientist for the EWG and Dr. Samarys Seguinot-Medina, ACAT’s Environmental Health Program Director, speaking January 31, 2024.

*This fact sheet has been created by CHE based on information presented in a CHE Alaska webinar. Selected quotes in bold are from the webinar speaker(s). For the full set of resources provided by the webinar presenters, see the [webinar page](#), where you’ll also find associated Slides & Resources.*

### **The Problem**

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Efforts to address PFAS contamination have been primarily directed at exposure from drinking water. However, a recent study by the EWG found high PFAS levels in locally caught freshwater fish across the United States.

For the study, researchers analyzed data for 501 composite samples of fish fillets collected across the United States from 2013 to 2015. The samples were collected as part of U.S. EPA sampling programs. The most frequently measured species were channel catfish (*Ictalurus*

*punctatus*), smallmouth bass (*Micropterus dolomieu*), largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*), yellow perch (*Perca flavescens*), and walleye (*Sander vitreus*).

### **Key findings:**

- Five hundred of the 501 samples tested positive for PFAS contamination.
- The PFAS levels found in the samples showed that just one serving of fish can be equivalent to drinking water contaminated with high levels of PFAS (48 parts per trillion) for a month.
- Widespread PFAS contamination of freshwater fish in surface waters in the U.S. is likely a significant source of exposure for all persons who consume those fish.

For communities that depend on caught fish for cultural practices or economic necessity, this is a social and environmental injustice. Dr. Seguinot-Medina stressed how this impacts many communities in Alaska that rely on traditional food sources. Several lakes in Alaska have fish consumption warnings due to PFAS contamination from firefighting foam. Atmospheric transport and ocean currents also carry pollutants to the Arctic from all over the planet. Unlike many other states, Alaska lacks regulations and health guidelines for PFAS contamination.

### **Recommendations**

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Both speakers stressed that we need to phase out non-essential uses of PFAS.

**“There's widespread contamination in both fish and wildlife on a global scale from PFAS and this really speaks to the urgency to phase out those non-essential uses.”**

We need to prevent future discharges to protect public health as well as wildlife. Dr. Stoiber highlighted that the protection of wildlife populations from PFAS pollution has the potential to contribute to ecosystem stability and economic sustainability. We need to create health-protective, enforceable drinking water standards to reflect the current science.

More research is needed for assessing and remediating PFAS contamination. Lawmakers need to pass provisions for comprehensive monitoring of surface and groundwaters, fish, wildlife, and garden produce. This is a right-to-know issue for affected communities.

We currently lack consistent national guidance for this problem, but many states are leading the way. States such as WA, CO, and CA are phasing out PFAS in fire-fighting foam, a significant source of contamination near airports. NY and IL have banned incineration of PFAS wastes. MN has passed a law that will ban the sale of non-essential products that use PFAS.

## To Find Out More

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- Watch the January 31, 2024 webinar: [PFAS in Locally Caught Fish: Threats to health & environmental justice](#)
- Read the presentation slides:
  - [PFAS in Locally Caught Fish: A Potential Significant Source of Exposure and Threat to Health](#)
  - [Environmental and Health Threats Associated with PFAS and Opportunities to Prevent Further Harm](#)
- Read the study on PFAS in fish: [Locally caught freshwater fish across the United States are likely a significant source of exposure to PFOS and other perfluorinated compounds](#)
- Read a study on one affected community: [PFAS in Drinking Water and Serum of the People of a Southeast Alaska Community: A Pilot Study](#)

## About the Speakers

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**Dr. Tasha Stoiber** is a Senior Scientist for the EWG and works to better understand the connections between exposure to chemicals and public health. As a member of EWG's science investigation's team, she researches contaminants in drinking water, indoor air pollution, and chemicals in consumer products and food. She holds dual bachelor's degrees in biological sciences and environmental engineering from Michigan Technological University. She attended graduate school at University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she earned a Ph.D. in environmental chemistry & technology. She joined EWG's San Francisco office in 2014.



**Dr. Samarys Seguinot-Medina** (Sama or by her given Yupik name Umyugalek) has been ACAT's Environmental Health Director for the last 14 years. Most of her work has been leading community-based participatory research in remote areas of Alaska and other EJ&H efforts in Puerto Rico, the US and Geneva, Switzerland as part of ACATs international work. She has a DrPH (Doctor in Public Health) from the University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus in San Juan and a master's degree in Environmental Risk Assessment and Planning from Universidad Metropolitana (Metropolitan University) in SJ, Puerto Rico.