

Safe Water Advisory Group (SWAG)
A City Council Advisory Committee
Portsmouth, New Hampshire

MEETING MINUTES
Tuesday, October 7, 2025

For the zoom recording:
https://youtu.be/Aqs_3GeX82Q

Attending: Chair Andrea Amico, Chief Bill McQuillen, Katrie Hillman, Gennevie Becksted Muskie, Councilor Rich Blalock, Councilor Vince Lombardi, Rep. David Meuse, Laurel Schaidler (zoom). Staff: Al Pratt, Mason Caceres, Mariah Habersham, Stephanie Seacord (recording secretary via zoom). Absent: Rich DiPentima, Kim McNamara

1. Welcome, Introduction & Approval of minutes – Andrea Amico, SWAG co-chair

Andrea announced the resignation from the committee of Jim Hewitt, accepted with regret and thanks for his service. On a motion by Chief McQuillen, seconded by Councilor Lombardi the minutes for June 18, 2025 were approved unanimously.

2. Quarterly Water Supply Update – Al Pratt, Water Resource Manager & SWAG co-chair

The drought continues but the Portsmouth and Pease Water Systems are continuing to meet the demand. Because the surface water supply has sustained, there's been less dependence on groundwater supplies from wells but the levels of all sources are sustainable. The Water System plans to paint the interior of the Spinney Rd water tank in Spring 2026 and Newington Booster in Fall 2026 and will have to drain the tower – still determining how that water will be used.

Full report: [Water Supply Status Report](#)

3. Cyanobacteria Update – Mariah Habersham

The GZA plan reported at a prior meeting is now complete. NHDES and Harlan Swayer are now reviewing all 13 water supplies including Portsmouth which has good response in place. The dissolved air flotation diffusers and activated carbon continue to be effective in preventing any cyanobacteria or toxins from getting into the treatment plant. One bloom on July 28 prompted additional testing that came back 'non detect' for toxins.

4. Pease PFAS Health Studies Update - Dr Laurel Schaidler, Silent Spring Institute

The State of NH and EPA require that the City test and monitor results for 6 PFAS variants (though the City tests/monitors all 30) and reports the data on the City website: [PFAS Sampling | City of Portsmouth](#)

The Pease REACH Report in July noted that the PFAS levels are declining in adults and children in the Pease study after 8 years. Women have lower levels than men in that time due to cycling out from breastfeeding, menstruation. CDC ATSDR multi-state PFAS study (CA, CO, MA, MI, NH, NJ, NY, PA) cites Pease response as a model, with testing of 776 adults of 5826 total collected. Long term impacts are still being studied. For a blood testing fact sheet, visit pfas-exchange.org. See meeting presentation for full details: [SWAG Meeting Slides 10-07-25.pdf](#)

5. Seacoast Drinking Water Commission - NH State Representative David Meuse

NH water systems are balkanized with many different water systems serving different proportions of public/private water. In Portsmouth 90% of residents are on the City Water Systems; in Stratham 90% have private wells. Focus of the Commission is on testing the water quality in those wells. Also continued consideration of water interconnection but with reduced Federal funding and a doubling of cost estimate the Portsmouth-Dover interconnect is on hold. Another concern is the potential for salt water incursion in groundwater from sea level rise.

6. Lead update - Mason Caceres, Assistant Water Resource Manager

The City must report the inventory of water service lines again on November 1, 2025. A preliminary report was made at the first deadline of October 16, 2024. Of 8700 service line connections there are still 486 private lines to inspect. These are receiving notification letters, same as last year, explaining the purpose, the risk from old galvanized lines and/or lead solder connections in home plumbing and funds that might be available to help homeowners with those replacements, that must be made by 2037. For the 2000 unidentified City lines, potholing at the curbstop starts October 8-9 in the Maple Haven neighborhood (where a statistically valid sample can be selected due to the homes' common construction date).

7. Water Main Flushing Program - Al Pratt

Due to the drought the Water Department is currently conducting targeted flushing for 4 weeks rather than the usual 6 weeks. The spring/fall schedule addresses the City's 1,213 public and 555 private hydrants and the purpose is to flush out sediment/deposits and to check the hydrant functionality. Earlier this year a surge in water demand on one line prompted a high pressure release of water to support the system – and disturbed sediment in the line which caused a temporary water discoloration. There was no risk in the water, just color.

8. PFAS update - Andrea Amico

Briandon Kernan at NH DES has no definitive answer on which new compound limits will proceed as defined in April 2024. Compliance is now 2031. The Air Force has not confirmed is payment will continue for cleanup but has implemented a moratorium on burning PFAS. The EPA is upholding the classification of PFOA and PFOS as Hazardous Materials.

Additional note 9 October: Brandon Kernan at NH DES to ask about David Meuse's question re: if GenX X (one of the PFAS drinking water standards that EPA will not defend) is found in Merrimack. He replied: I believe GenX has only been found in Merrimack at the Saint Gobain site itself where PFAS levels are extremely high. I do not know if GenX is found at other waste sites where PFAS is very high. I have copied my colleague in the Waste Division – Jeff Marts – in case he can provide info on this. Based on thousands of sampling results from private wells and public water systems, it is not in the environment even when PFOA and PFOS exceed 4 ppt. 12/15 ppt or 70 ppt. We can download our results to show you if you want them. The only data showing a detection are data that have been flagged by the labs because laboratory contamination is evident by the fact GenX was also detected in lab blanks. My counterparts in the other NE states see the same thing relative to GenX and lab directors have confirmed that this is what they are seeing.

There's a hybrid meeting on PFAS Research in Great Bay on Tuesday, October 21, 2025, from 6-7:30pm, at Newington Town Hall and via Teams. Here is the meeting [flyer](#) and here is the [link to register](#) if attending virtually.

9. Mission Vote - Andrea Amico

On a motion by Councilor Blalock, seconded by Councilor Lombardi the committee approved the following new language to accompany its recommendation to the new Council to reappoint a SWAG: To review and communicate the latest science on the health and environmental effects of PFAS, to monitor federal and state level legislative changes, and to anticipate policy changes that could impact the city of Portsmouth. To discuss topics relevant to the City's drinking water quantity, quality, preservation and conservation efforts, and water infrastructure projects. To discuss public health aspects of water quality, support and provide public education about drinking water topics, and take proactive stances to protect and conserve water quality and quantity.

10. SWAG end of year summary/recommendations to City Council - Andrea Amico

Andrea and Al will prepare the draft report. SWAG members will review and are asked to send Andrea suggestions for inclusion. For examples of prior reports visit:

2023 SWAG Report to City Council: [Microsoft Word - SWAG City Council Report 2023](#)

2021 SWAG Report to City Council [SWAG City Council Report 2021_12152021.pdf](#)

11. Public comment – None.

Adjourned at 8:26 pm

Next meeting: Thursday, December 4, 2025 at 6:30 pm, City Hall Conference Room A

MEETING PURPOSE

Founded by City Council action on October 5, 2020, the group's stated mission is: To review and communicate the latest science on the health and environmental effects of PFAS, to monitor federal and state level legislative changes, and to anticipate policy changes that could impact the City of Portsmouth.