

# The Intelligencer

RECEIVED

NOV 18 2019

HORSHAM WATER AND  
SEWER AUTHORITYOpinion

## Editorial: Plenty of blame to go around for PFAS-contamination in the Rockhills

Posted Nov 17, 2019 at 5:46 AM

If someone set your house on fire and crews from the local military bases showed up and used firefighting foam containing toxic PFAS chemicals on the blaze, you'd probably object to being solely blamed for the resulting drinking water contamination.

But that's roughly where Bergey's Tires finds itself this week after the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection released a statement identifying Bergey's Tires as a "potentially responsible party" for PFAS chemicals found in the drinking water of several hundred residents near the border of East Rockhill and West Rockhill.

From 1983 to the middle of 1985, the Montgomery County-based tire and auto operation with 30 shops across five states housed a pyrolator there, which it used to recycle old tires. It was reportedly the first of its kind in the country and it used extreme heat in a zero-pressure, oxygen-free chamber to convert the tires into oil, methane gas, steel, synthetic fibers and carbon black.

But the process did not prove to be all that cost-effective and the pyrolator was shut down in August 1985. Yet the tires continued to pile up.

In November 1986 a mysterious arson fire consumed an estimated 70,000 tires and took 35 fire companies, including ones from the former Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Willow Grove and the Naval Air Warfare Center in Warminster, 20 hours to control.

Bergey's doesn't get a pass. It allowed the number of tires to grow. But the contaminants came from the firefighting foam, not the tires, so we can understand the position taken by Bergey's chief financial officer who, last year,

said "to our knowledge, we have done nothing to cause the contamination, therefore we do not believe we are responsible for the related costs."

Yet this seems to us to be a case where there's culpability all the way around. We believe the manufacturers that produced the foam and the military that deployed it deserve a seat at that table.

If Bergey's wasn't pryolating the tires then, as a West Rockhill supervisor said in 1985, "it is a dump and that's a violation." Heck, if that board of supervisors had taken stronger action when residents started complaining about the tires, maybe they wouldn't have been the target of an arsonist more than a year later.

With so much blame to go around, it's frustrating that the blameless residents are shouldering the greatest cost. Scientists have linked some PFAS chemicals to ulcerative colitis, thyroid disease, reproductive issues and forms of cancer. Some residents who drank water from those wells believe the chemicals have been making them sick.

Beyond the suspected link between their health problems and the contaminated water, residents have endured impacted property values and, for some, years of frustration as they've sought relief.

Fourteen nearby private wells were found to contain PFAS levels that exceeded an EPA-recommended safety limit. Those residents asked to be connected to public water systems. Instead, they got bottled water and the promise of filters, which the DEP is in the process of installing.

Someone needs to help the residents here. Can't those who share the blame, also share the responsibility of coming to their aid?