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The need for affordable PFAS water testing

An alternative emerges to expensive state-accredited tests.

by [Marina Schaffler](#) | October 2, 2022



Recent testing done by Friends of Merrymeeting found high PFAS levels in three small creeks that drain from the Brunswick Naval Air Station to the Androscoggin River, with the westernmost creek (see red arrow) having 922 nanograms/liter. Photo by Point of View Helicopter Services.

When members of the regional watershed group Friends of Merrymeeting Bay (FOMB) learned about a relatively affordable [PFAS water-testing kit](#) made by the Illinois company [Cyclopure](#), they envisioned using it to screen waters in the six rivers that feed the bay. To ensure credible results, the group’s chair, Ed Friedman, organized what he termed a “[Consumer Reports-style comparison](#),” sending split samples from a single water source to Cyclopure, and to three labs accredited by state and federal agencies.

FOMB found that the Cyclopure kit, which uses a corn-based disk designed to extract PFAS from water, delivered comparable results to two of the accredited labs in a similar time frame (a week or two) at substantial cost savings; each kit costs less than \$80 rather than between \$400 and \$700. (The third accredited lab failed to detect many compounds the other labs had and took more than a month to deliver results.)



Friends of Merrymeeting Bay (FOMB) recently used Cyclopure water test kits to assess PFAS levels of tributaries leading into the Bay. FOMB chair Ed Friedman sampled the westernmost creek leading from Brunswick Naval Air Station to the Androscoggin River, a site that had the highest PFAS reading among all 30 sites sampled. Photo by Chris Gutscher/FOMB.

PFAS Free Trenton, a citizen's group that recently persuaded the town's select board [to approve purchasing](#) 100 test kits for residents, chose to test with accredited labs despite the added cost, said its spokesperson, Christina Heiniger, because those tests are the only ones recognized by the state.

"DEP uses only lab-accredited processes because sampling results need to be reliable, consistent and replicable to the greatest extent possible," the agency's spokesperson David Madore wrote. "This is critically important as DEP makes both policy and funding decisions based upon the results obtained."

"FOMB's analysis and validation of the Cyclopure methodology challenges DEP's argument and policy," Friedman noted, adding that for the many homeowners who don't know in advance if they will receive a state reimbursement for water-testing, the "high price of certified testing is a huge disincentive."

Bob Bowcock, a national water consultant who is collaborating with the [activist Erin Brockovich](#) to help Maine communities address PFAS contamination, sees screening tests as a means of triage given "we've got an emergency on our hands," he said. He has four full-time assistants working in Maine to locate contamination hot spots, doing preliminary screening "where you can get five test kits for the price of (an accredited) one."

"The state could screen so many more people so much more quickly," Bowcock added, "if they just looked at alternative strategies."

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