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# PFAS: Beyond the Basics Training

**Biosolids**

**Source Zones**

**Fate and Transport**

**Characterization and Treatment**



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# Today's PFAS Trainers



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# ITRC PFAS Resources

ITRC PFAS: <https://pfas-1.itrcweb.org/>

Guidance Document

13 Fact Sheets

External Tables

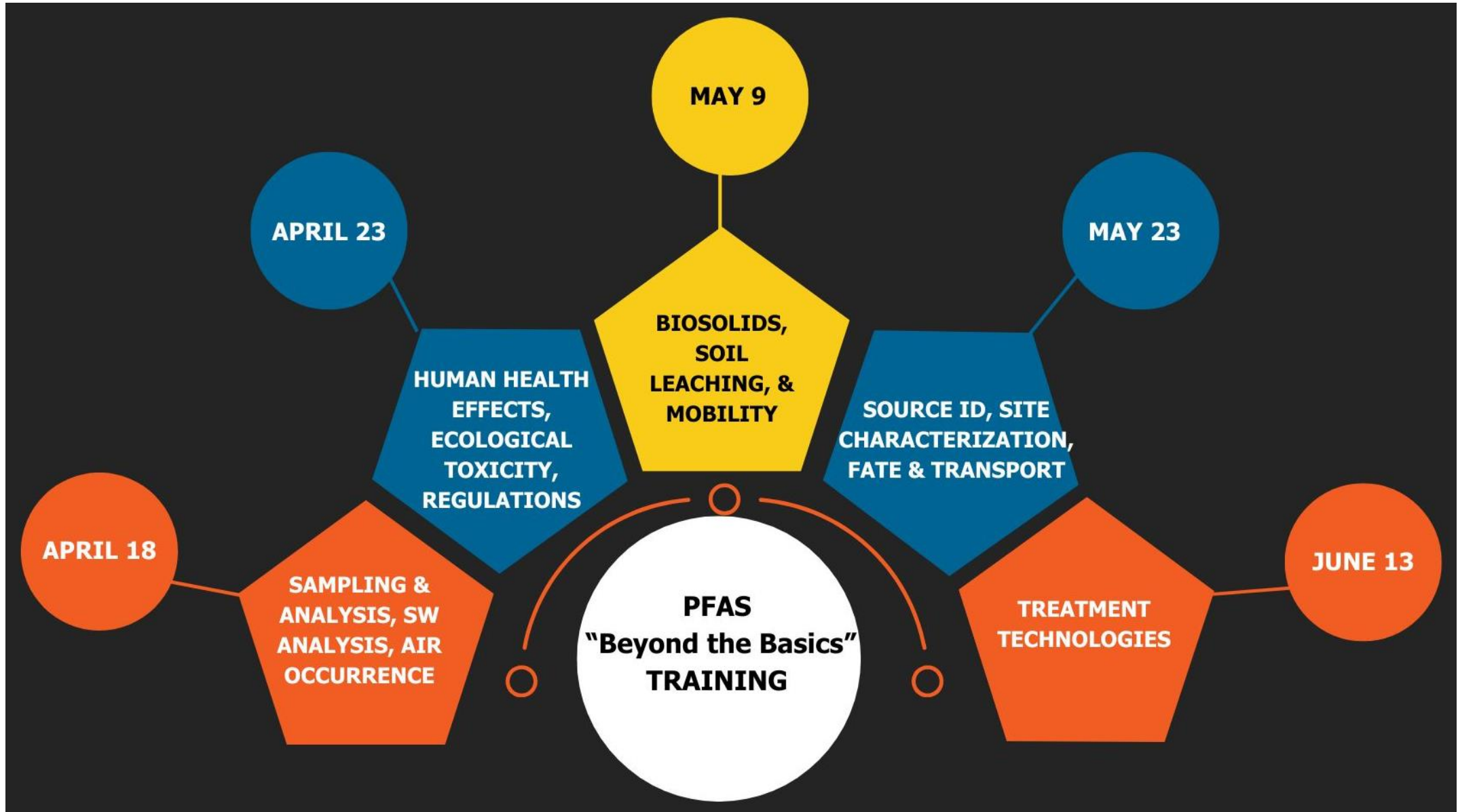
## PFAS Introductory Training

- Clu-In Archive: <https://www.clu-in.org/conf/itrc/PFAS-Introductory/>

## Other video resources

- Available through links on: <https://pfas-1.itrcweb.org>
- Quick Explainer Videos
- Longer PFAS Training Modules
- Archived Roundtable Sessions

# ITRC PFAS Team: 2024 “Beyond the Basics” Training Modules



# Biosolids & PFAS Fate and Transport in the Vadose Zone

Source Zone  
Characteristics

Vadose Zone  
Controls on  
Mobility

Field Scale Fate,  
Transport,  
Uptake

Characterization  
and Treatment

Additional Biosolids Considerations &  
Summary

**Source Zones**

**Fate and Transport**

**Characterization and  
Treatment**

**Biosolids**

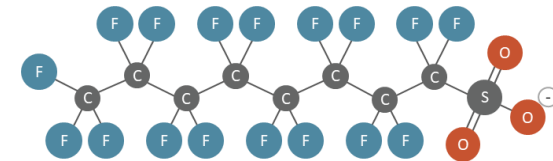
# PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances)

## Perfluoroalkyl substances

- PFAAs typically in anionic form
  - Sometime named based on acid or salt
- Mobility
  - PFCAs >PFSAs
  - Short chain >long chain
  - PFAAs may be present in linear or branched form - change in structure also affects sorption/mobility in the environment
- See Sections 2.2 and Section 4.3 for detail

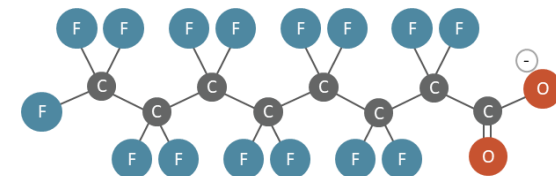
## Perfluoroalkyl acids, or PFAAs

### PFSA (perfluoroalkane sulfonates)



PFOS (perfluorooctane sulfonate)

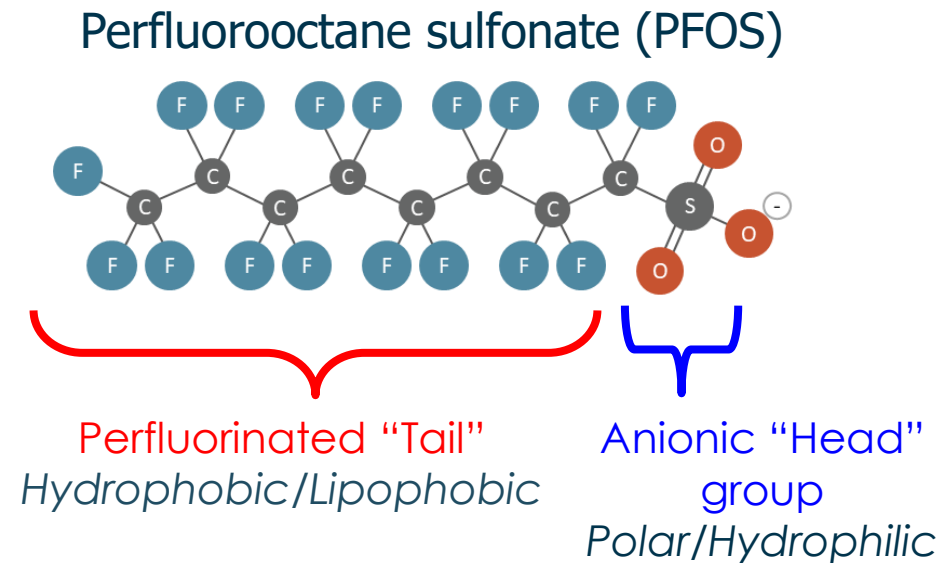
### PFCAs (perfluoroalkyl carboxylates)



PFOA (perfluorooctane carboxylate)



# The Heads and Tails of PFAAs



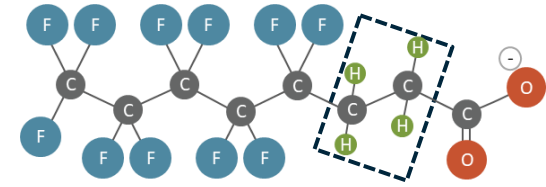
Perfluoroalkyl acids (PFAAs) are extremely persistent in the environment and are mobile in groundwater

# PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances)

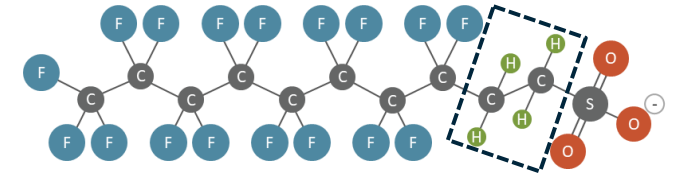
## Polyfluoroalkyl substances

- Fluorotelomers (FT...), sulfonamide/sulfoanamido groups, diPAPs
- Neutral, anions, cations, zwitterions
- “Precursors”

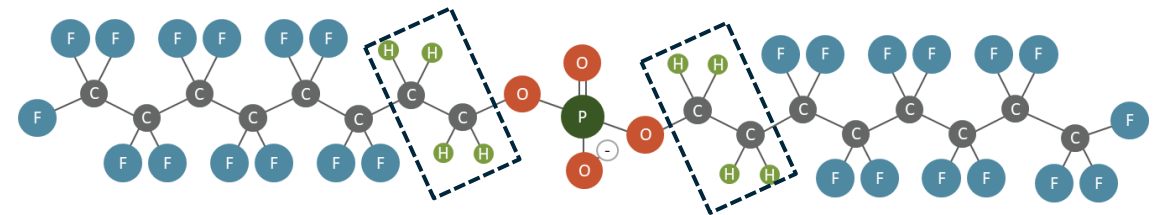
5:3 Fluorotelomer carboxylate (5:3 FTCA)



8:2 Fluorotelomer sulfonate (8:2 FTS)



6:2 Polyfluoroalkyl Phosphate Diester (6:2 diPAP)



# Biosolids and PFAS Fate and Transport in the Vadose Zone

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## Additional Biosolids Considerations & Summary

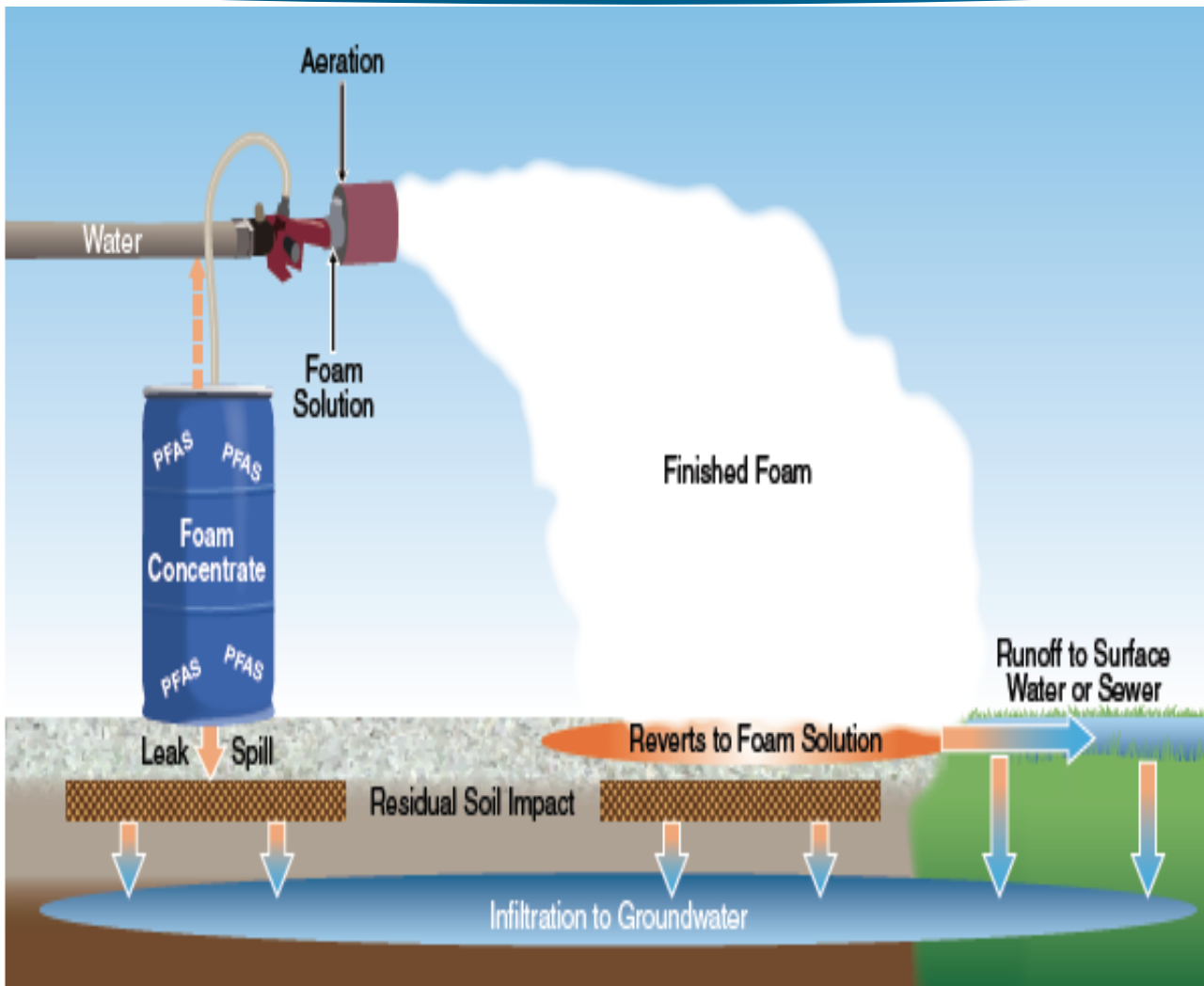
**Source Zones**

**Fate and Transport**

**Characterization and  
Treatment**

**Biosolids**

# Aqueous Film Forming Foams (AFFF) Source Zones



## Foam release:

- **Spills, Leaks**
  - Low volume releases of foam concentrate
- **Firefighting Operations**
  - Moderate volume discharge of foam solution
  - Infrequent high-volume, broadcast discharge
- **Historic Training Operations, Equipment Checks**
  - Periodic, high volume, broadcast discharge

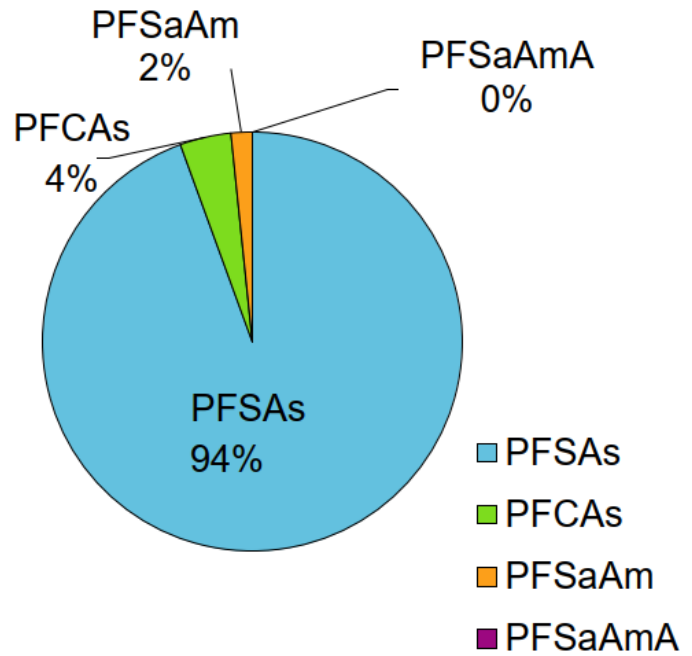
PFAS-1, Figure 3-4 Release of firefighting foam.

Source: Adapted from figure by J. Hale, Kleinfelder, used with permission.

PFAS-1, Section 3.3 Mechanisms for Release to the Environment.

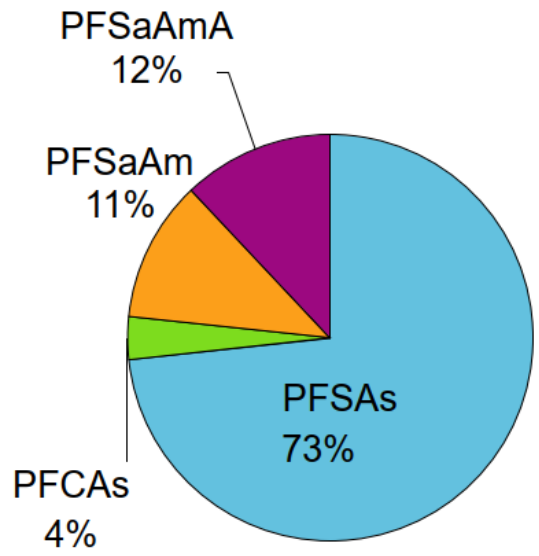
# AFFF Source Zones – Product Chemistry Changed

**1989 3M AFFF**

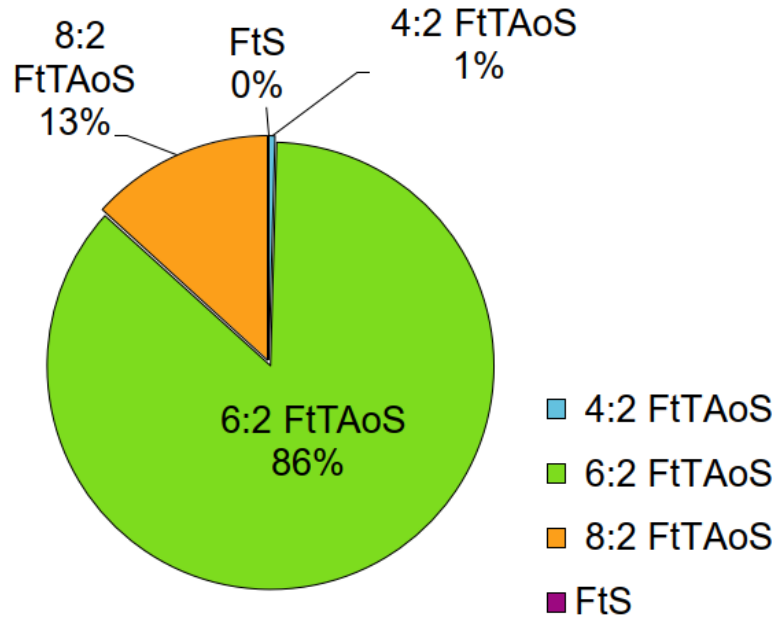


Electrochemical Fluorination

**1993-2001 3M AFFF**



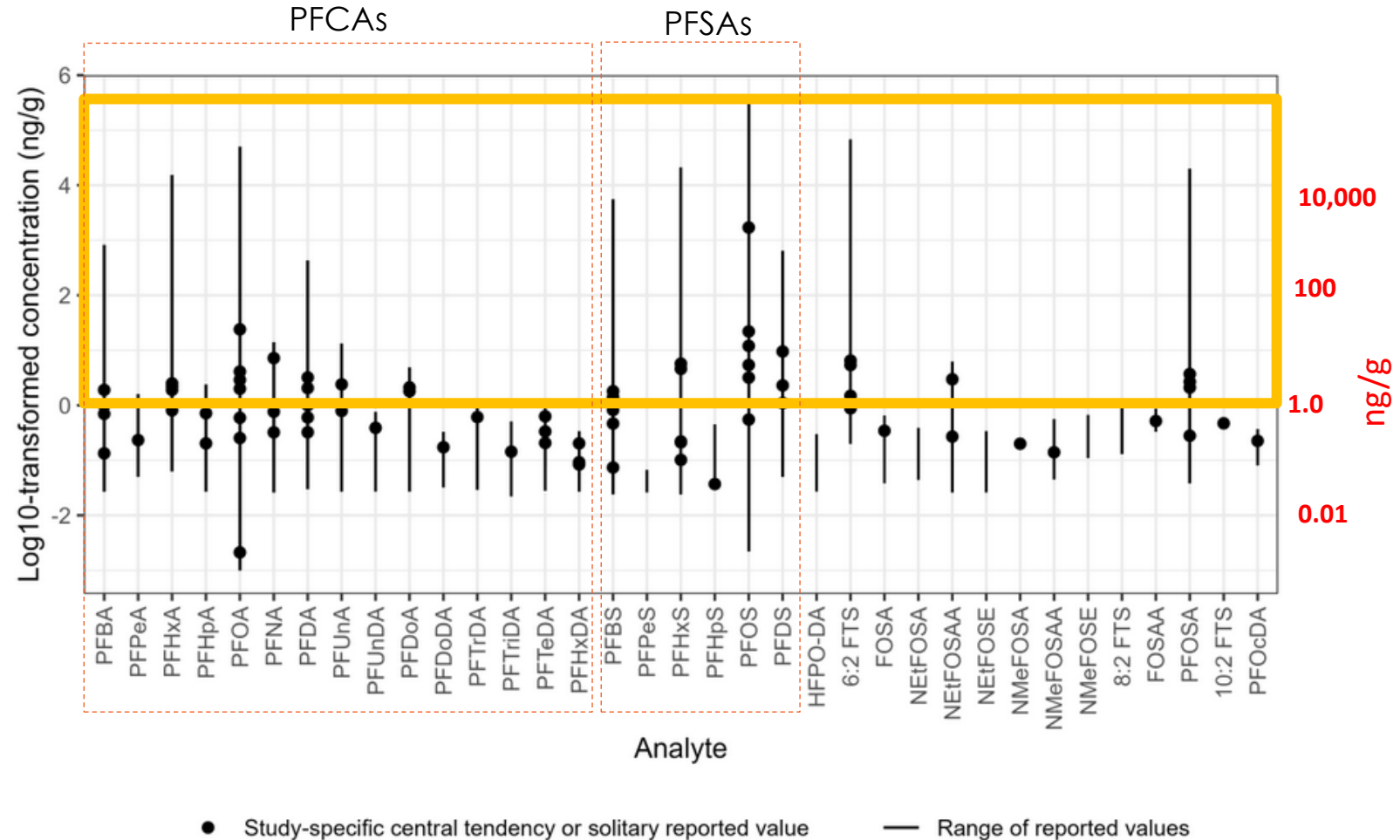
**2008 Ansul AFFF**



Fluorotelomerization

# AFFF Source Zones – PFAS Occurrence

- Suite of PFAS PFSAs, PFCAs most common
  - 6:2 FTS, PFOSA also present
- Upper bound of reported concentration in soil orders of magnitude greater than other sites
- Extent generally limited to application area (location of activity)
  - Impact extended by subsequent transport (runoff, infiltration)
  - Highest detections generally found in shallow soils



Sources: Brusseau et al. (2020), Groffen et al. (2019), Sanborn Head & Associates (2022), Sorengard et al. (2022), USGS (2022), Wang et al. (2018)

PFAS-1, 2023 Section 6 Figure 6-2A, Observed PFAS concentrations in site and anthropogenic background soil. Source: Figure developed using ggplot2 (Wickham 2016).

# AFFF Source Zones – Vadose-Zone PFAS Transport

- High-concentration training area vs low-concentration (e.g., 1-time release at vehicle fire)
  - Higher source concentrations may = migration of PFAS to depths up to 30 m
  - Relative increase in short chain vs long chain PFAS with depth
- Biological/abiotic transformation of precursors to PFAAs
- Physical and chemical properties (PFAS and soils)

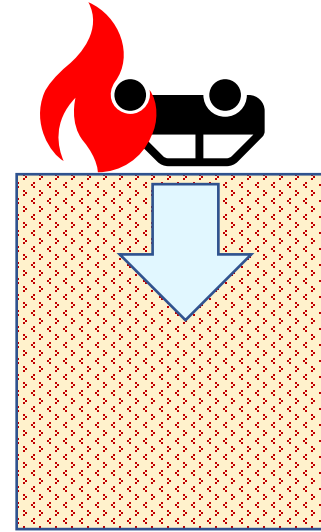
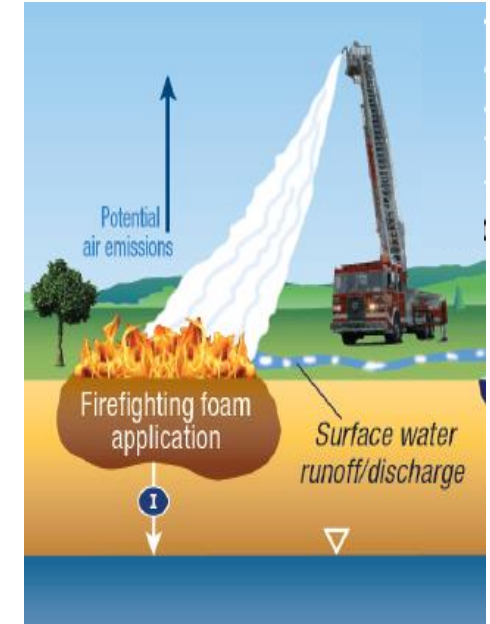


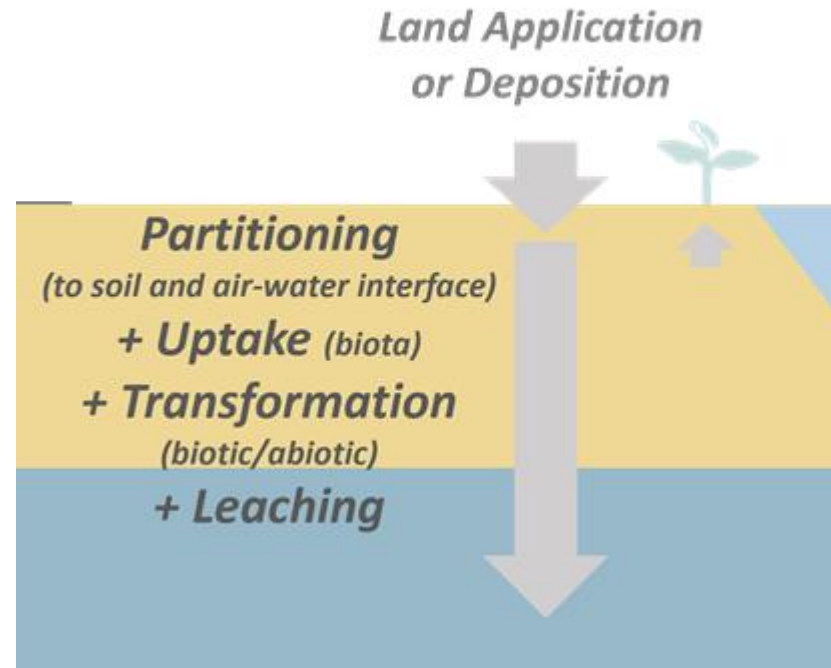
Figure Source: C. Evans, ME DEP, used with permission.



PFAS-1, Figure 2-19. Figure Adapted from figure by L. Trozzolo, TRC, used with permission.



# Biosolids Source Zones – Land Application



- 1) Attributed to: Andrew Smith / *Muck-spreading on Little Down, Slindon* / CC BY-SA 2.0
- 2) PFAS-1, modified from Figure 5-1. Source: D. Adamson, GSI, used with permission.
- 3) Photo Source: C. Evans, ME DEP. Used with permission



# What are Biosolids?

**Class B** : Treated to reduce pathogens but typically require a permit to land apply & have management practices governing their use on cropland, forestland , and land reclamation – not appropriate for lawns/gardens;

Treatment also includes meeting requirements for trace metals, currently no organics in Rules

**Class A**: Further treated to remove pathogens to levels safe for lawns and home gardens in many cases

# Sources of PFAS in Wastewater and Biosolids

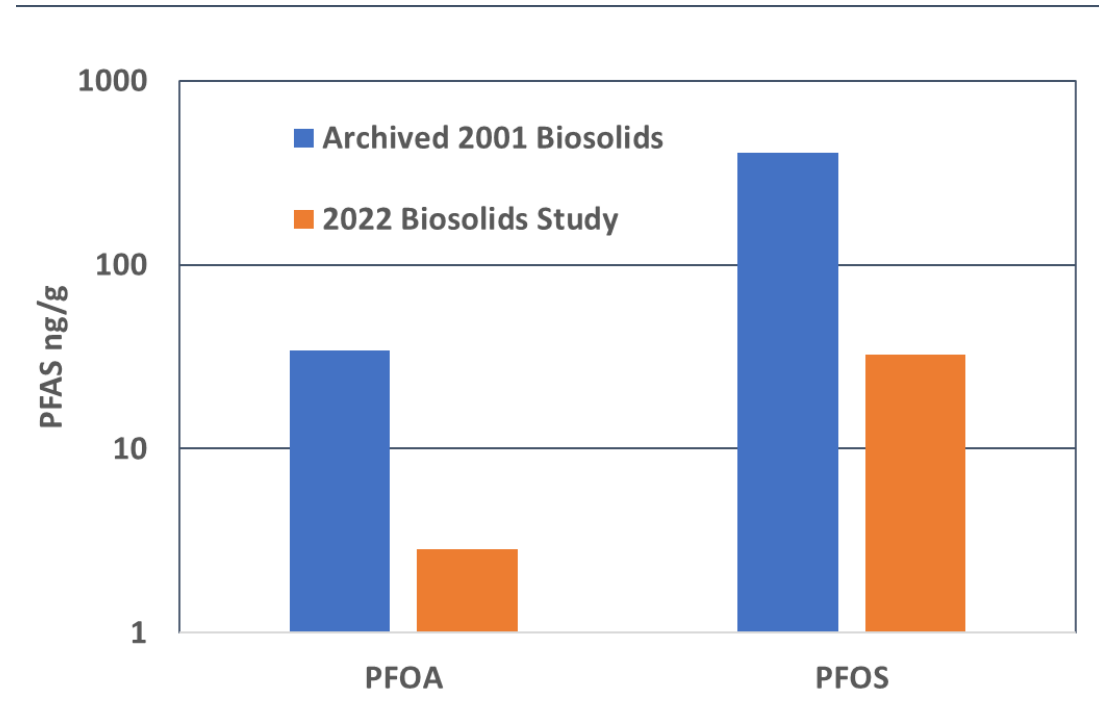
- All municipal/commercial wastewater contains some PFAS
  - leather tanning & finishing
  - plastics & synthetic fibers
  - pulp, paper & paperboard
  - textile mills
- Residential sources exist too



Photo taken by [Watzmann \(c\) Günter Seggebäing](#). [CC BY-SA 3.0](#) Via Wikimedia Commons

# PFAS in Biosolids

- Biosolids tend to be enriched in longer chain (>C6) PFAAs but contain a wide range of precursor and non-target PFAS
- Decline of PFOS/PFOA
- Non-target PFAS/potential precursors represent 77-97% of total molar Fluorine
  - Fluorotelomer acids (often 8:2/6:2/4:2)
  - diPAPs (often 6:2 or 8:2)
  - Ultra Short Chain



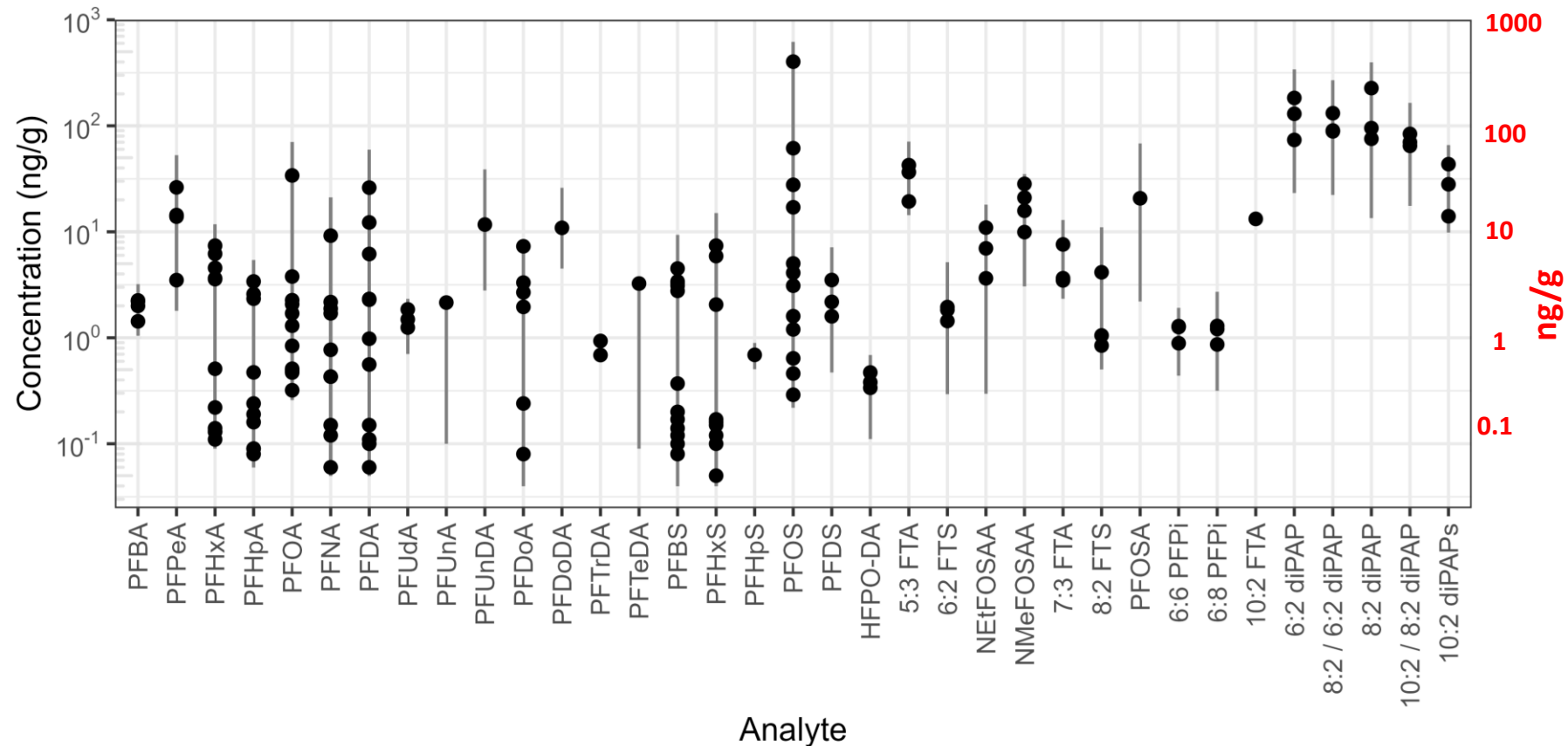
(1) And (2)

Graph Source: C. Evans, ME  
DEP, used with permission.

(1) Venkatesan, A.K., and R.U. Halden. 2013. Journal of Hazardous Materials 252-253:413-418

(2) Schaefer, C. E., et al Water Research 217:118405.

# PFAS in Biosolids (Literature Range of Values)

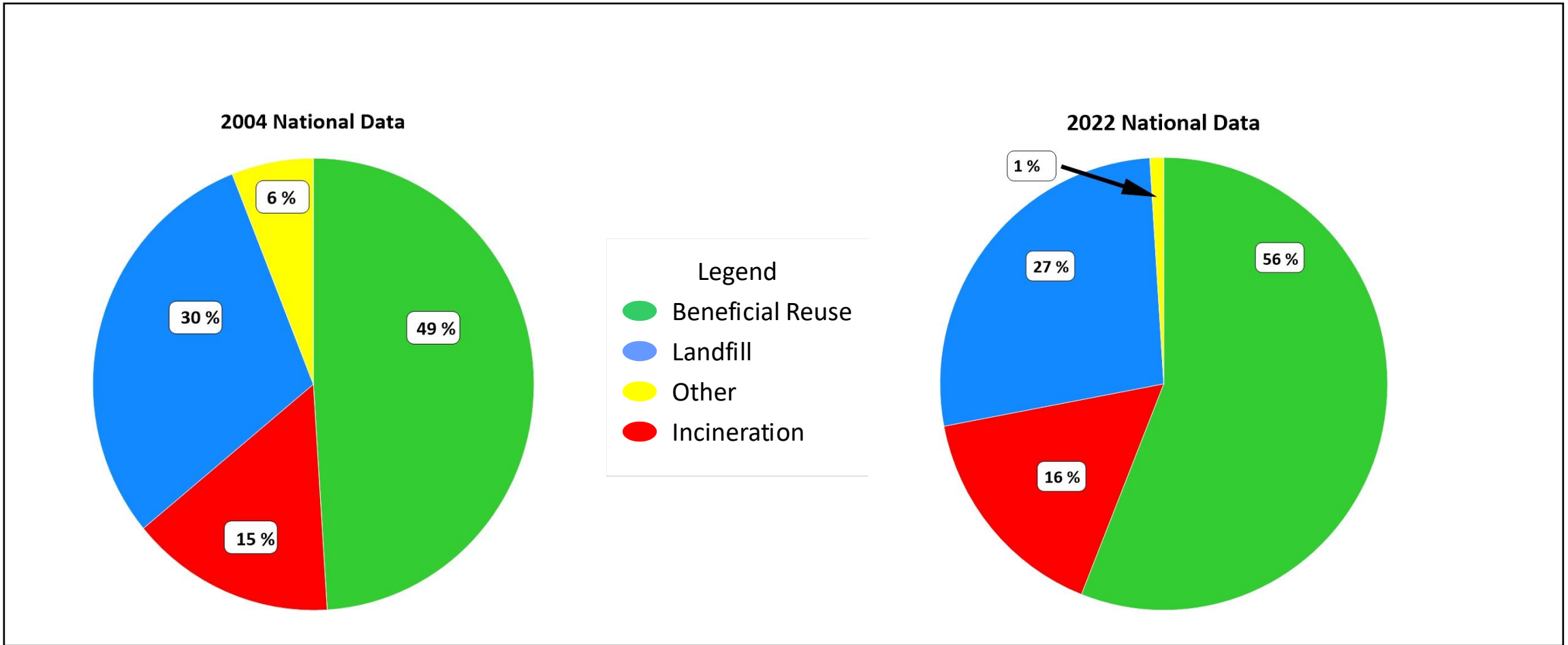


Sources: Pepper et al. (2021), Schaefer et al. (2022), Venkatesan and Halden (2013), Venkatesan and Halden (2014)

Composite ranges and study-specific averages are shown

PFAS-1, 2023 Section 6 Figure 6-2C, Range of values for common PFAS in Biosolids. Source: Figure developed using ggplot2 (Wickham 2016).

# Disposal and Beneficial Reuse





# PFAS in Land Applied Soils

## Direct Land Application

- Promoted by states, historically
- Potentially impacts water supplies in nearby residential homes
- Potential for exposure when fields redeveloped as housing
- Impacts may be significant when commercial or industrial inputs are large percent of total
- Persistence in farm soils – decades after application
- Use for land reclamation projects to incorporate organic matter

## Biosolids processed in compost

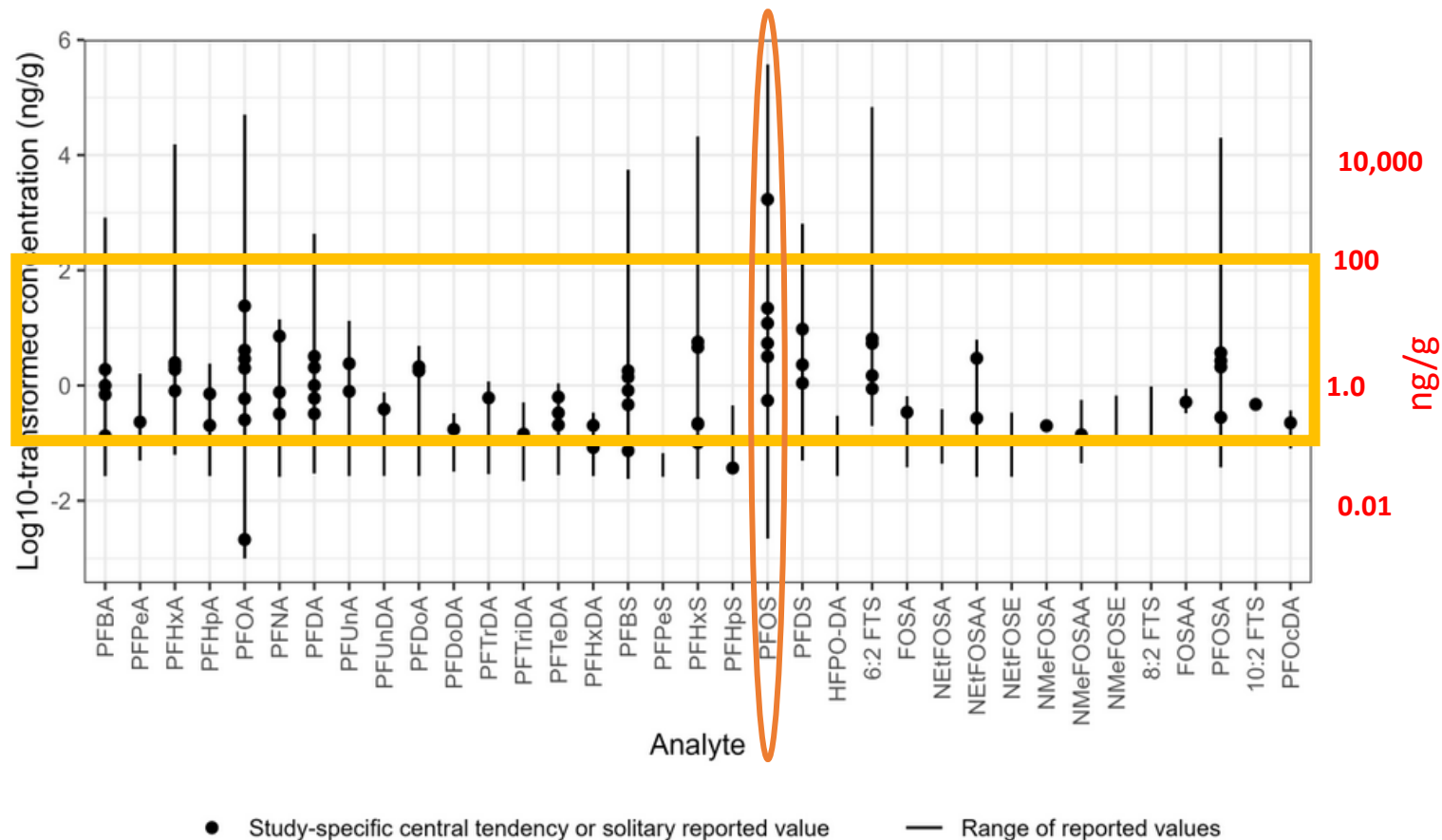
- Less tracking
- Sold widely in commercial – retail settings
- Gardens, landscaping



Attributed to: Andrew Smith / [Muck-spreading on Little Down, Slindon](#) / [CC BY-SA 2.0](#)

# PFAS in Land Applied Soil

- Highest concentrations found in surface soils
- PFOS still has high frequency of detection due to legacy application
- Field studies show preferential sorption of long chains vs short chains



Sources: Brusseau et al. (2020), Groffen et al. (2019), Sanborn Head & Associates (2022), Sorengard et al. (2022), USGS (2022), Wang et al. (2018)

PFAS-1, 2023 Section 6 Figure 6-2A, Observed PFAS concentrations in site and anthropogenic background soil. Source: Figure developed using ggplot2 (Wickham 2016).

# PFAS in Land Applied Soil

Transport through the vadose zone at land application sites

Longer chain/precursors preferentially sorb in surface soil

Vertical Migration Extent Varies

- Studies report detectable PFAS to depth of 18 m but concentrations rapidly decrease with depth
- One study of FTOHs found no detectable concentrations in depth intervals below 10 cm

Composition of detected PFAS may change with depth, with greater PFCAs vs PFASs detected



# Biosolids are different from AFFF sites!

	Biosolids	AFFF
Concentrations	Up to 618 µg/kg (Table 6-2C) <i>over large area (~10s-100s of acres)</i>	Up to 373,000 µg/kg (Table 6-2A) <i>over limited area (~&lt;1 acre)</i>
Sources	PFAS in wastewater (municipal or industrial); 1980s to present	AFFF produced with PFAS; mid-1960s to present
Site Types	Mostly agricultural and other land application sites; broad area at limited frequency	Fire training/response areas at DoD, airports, oil-and-gas sites; higher application rate & frequency
Implications	Shallow soil impacts may affect crops and livestock, surface and groundwater	Local/regional sources may affect groundwater & drinking water

# Biosolids and PFAS Fate and Transport in the Vadose Zone

Source Zone  
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and Treatment

Additional Biosolids Considerations & Summary

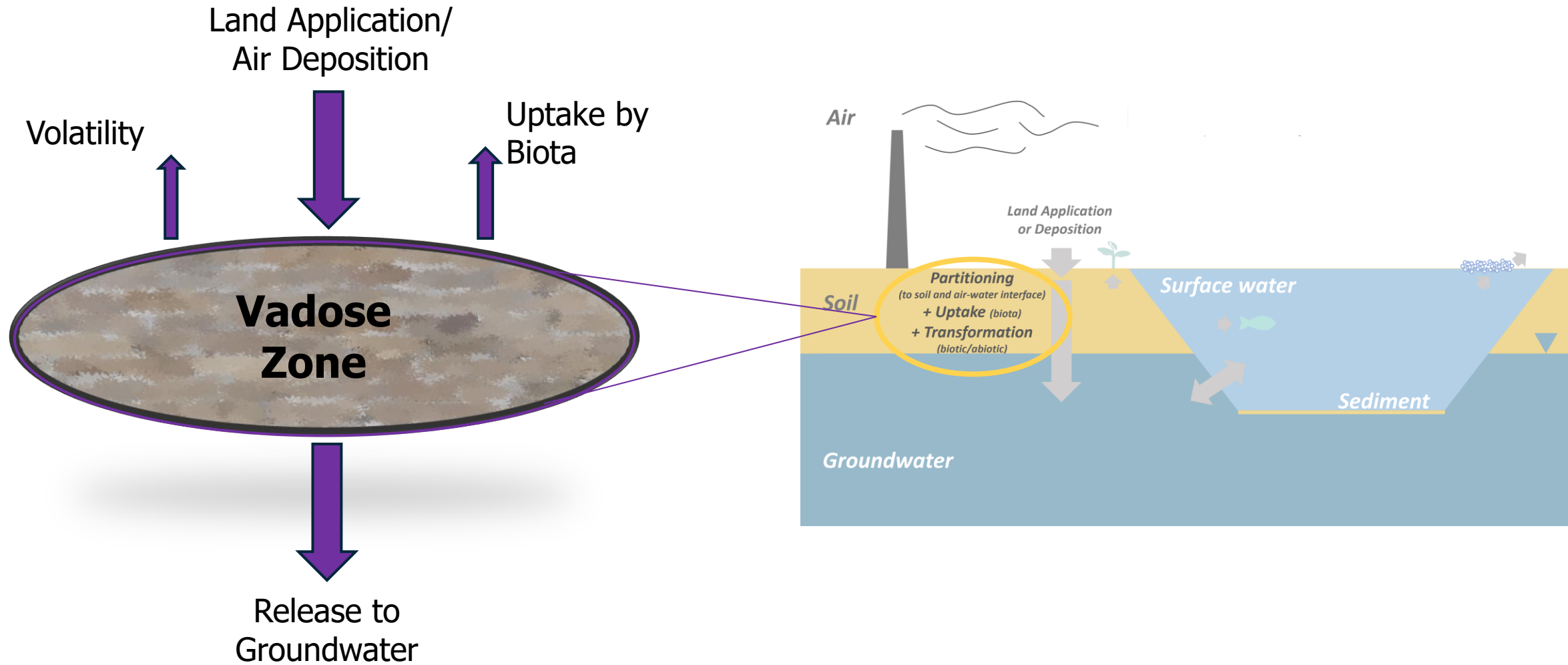
**Biosolids**

**Source Zones**

**Fate and Transport**

**Characterization and  
Treatment**

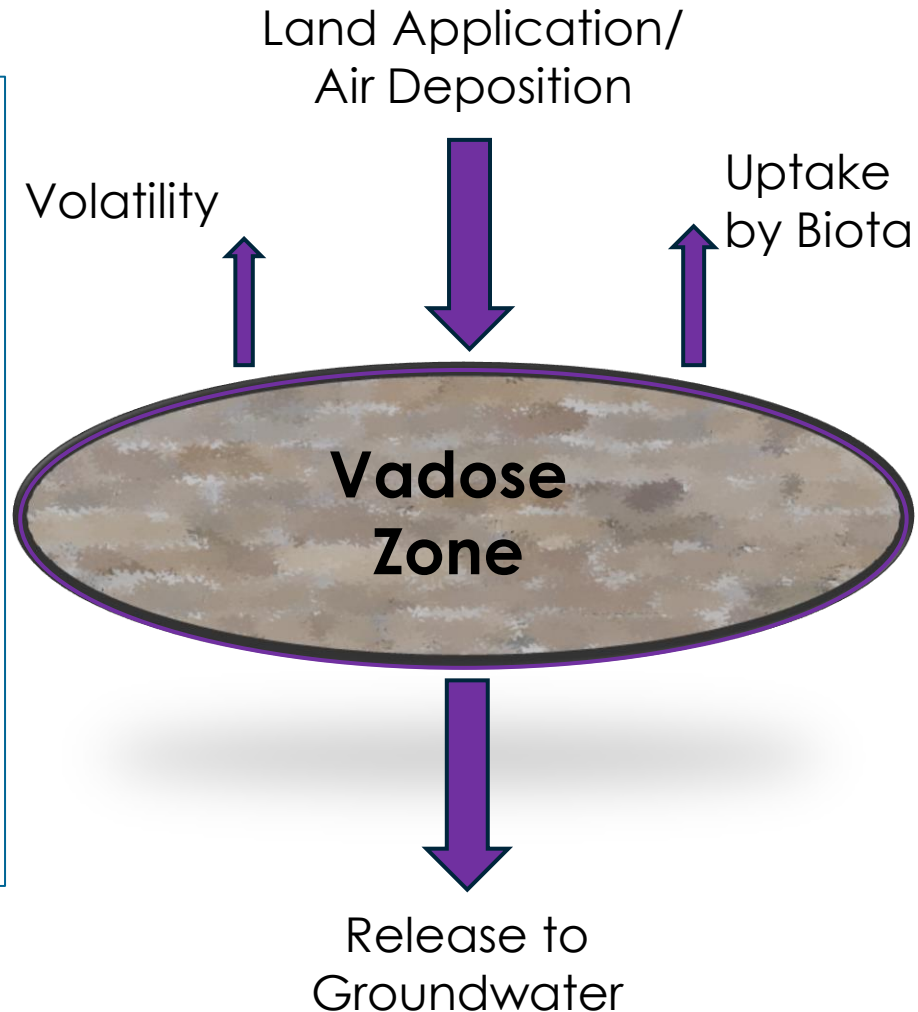
# Macro-Scale Transport in the Vadose Zone



# Macro-Scale Factors Influencing PFAS Retention

## Climate/Location

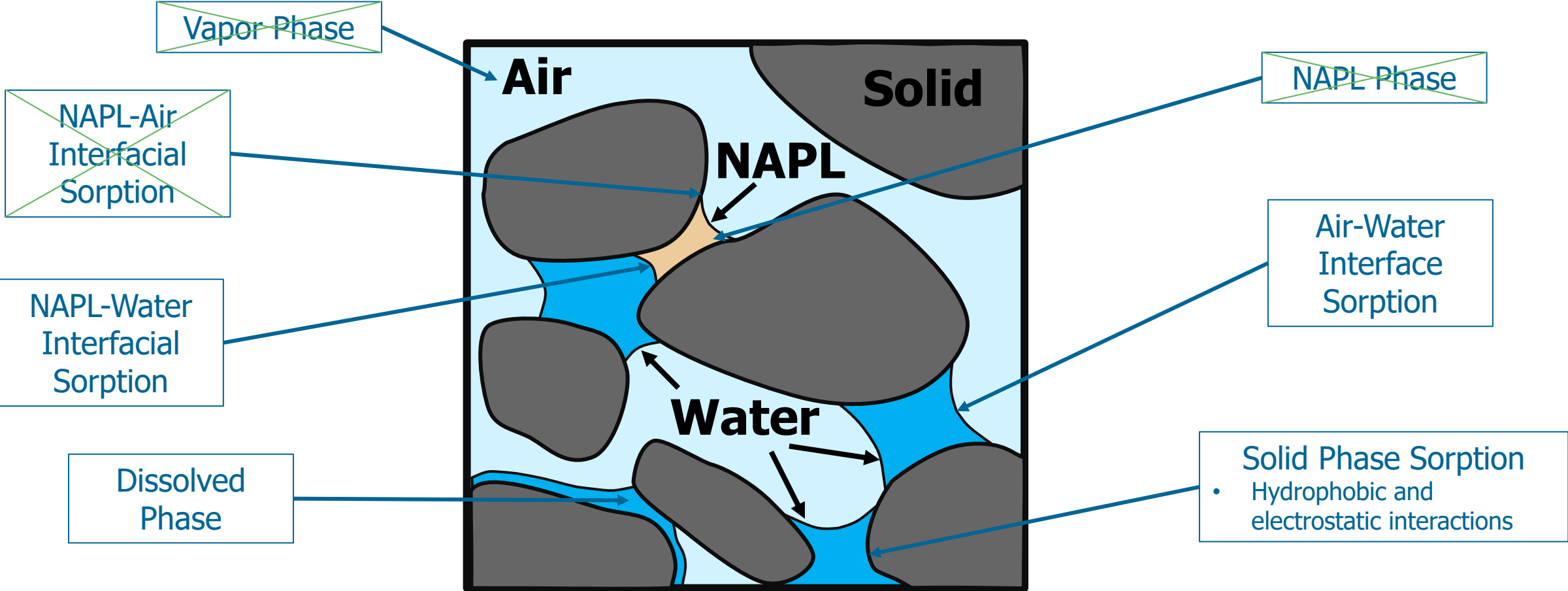
- Amount of precipitation
- Frequency of precipitation
- Depth to water
- Salinity
- Humidity



## Soil Properties

- Surface Charge
- pH
- Heterogeneity
- Organic carbon content
- Soil type
- Degree of saturation

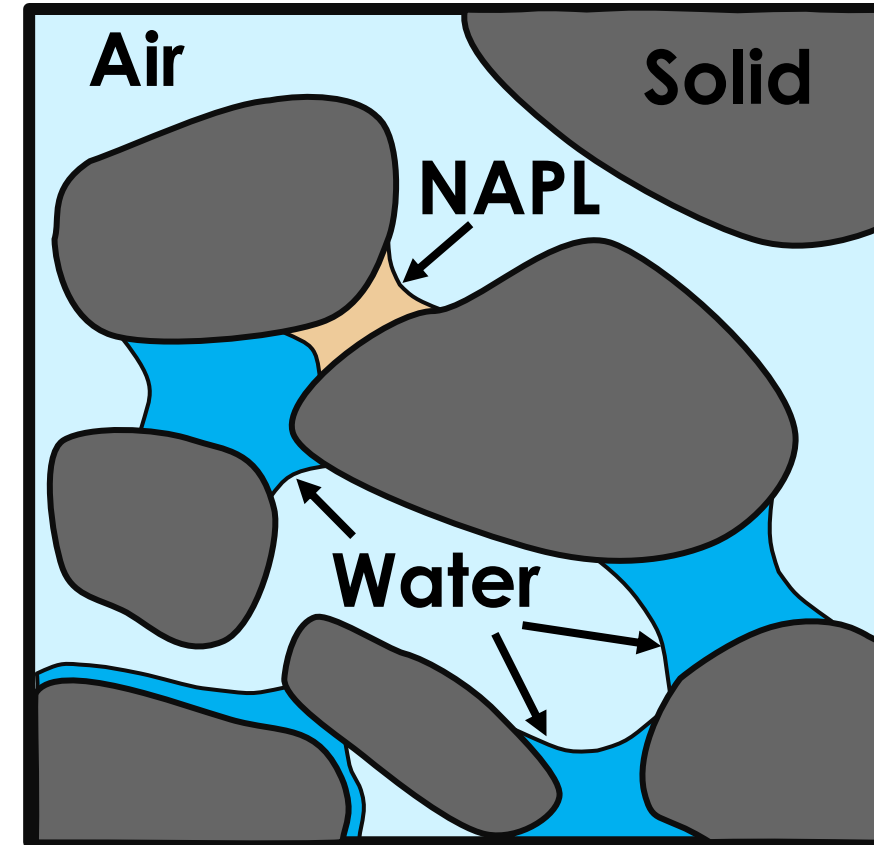
# Micro-Scale Transport of PFAs in the Vadose Zone



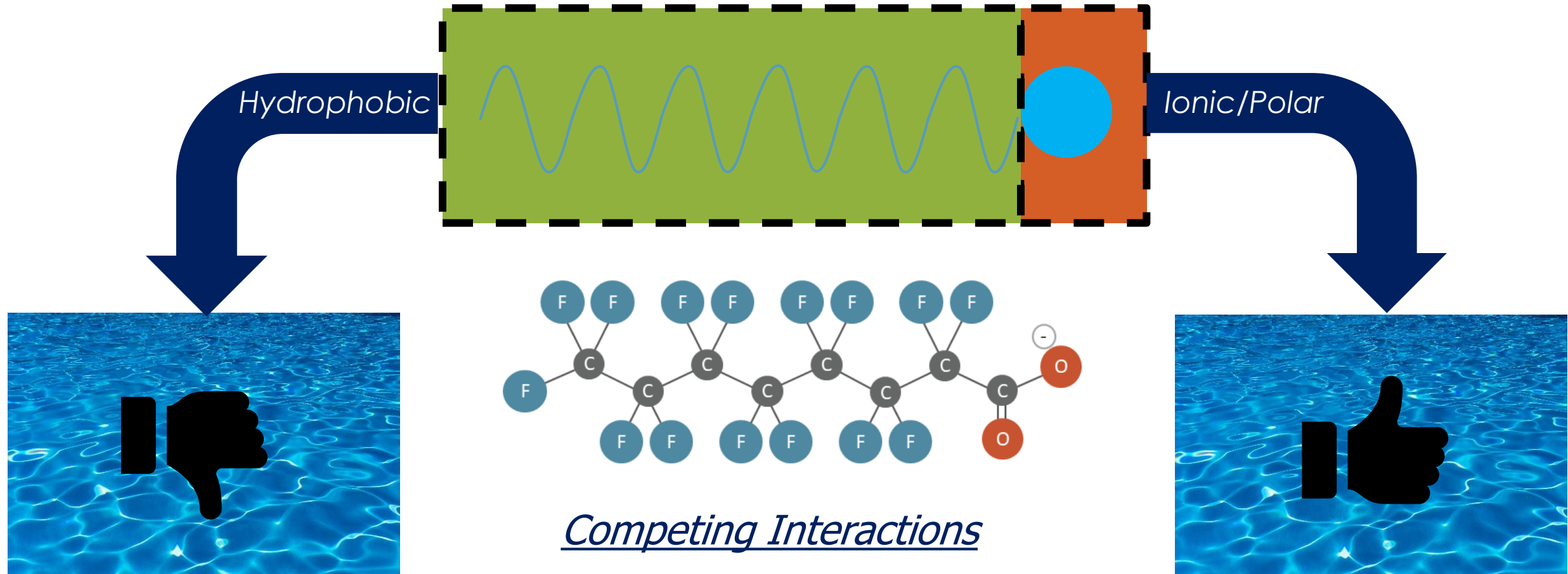
# Micro-Scale Factors Influencing PFAS Retention

## Properties of Solid Phase Sorption

- Hydrophobic Partitioning
  - Longer chain PFAAs > shorter-chain PFAAs
  - PFSAs > PFCAs
  - Organic carbon dependent
- Electrostatic Interactions
  - Dependent on pH and ionic strength
  - Cationic/zwitterionic PFAS may strongly sorb
- Concentration dependent (nonlinear)
  - Sorption sites can become saturated
- Sorption properties change with precursor transformation



# PFAA Surfactant Properties Are Important



# PFAA Molecules Assemble at the Interface

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Energetically favorable

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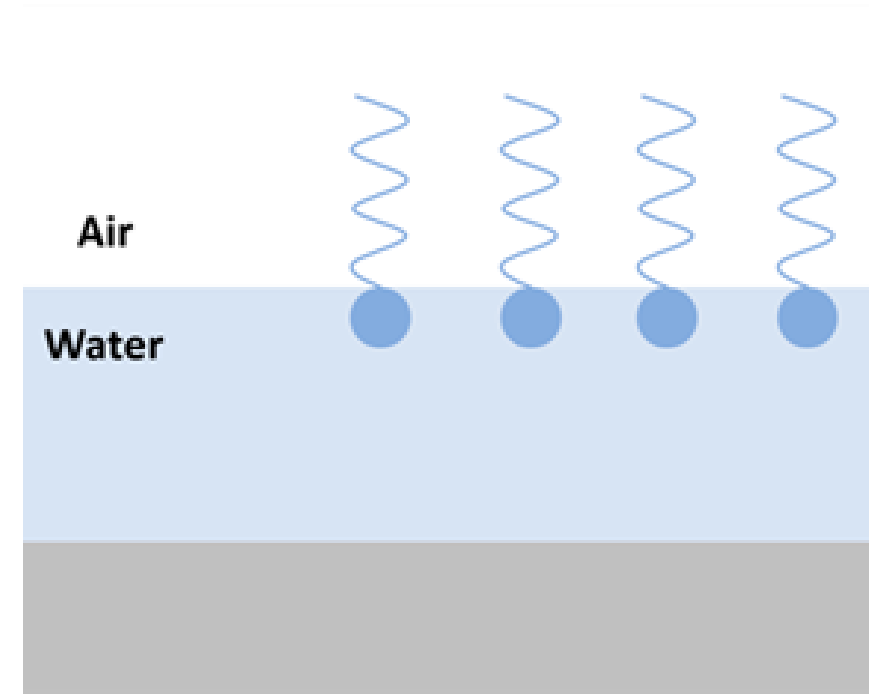
Reduces the surface tension at the interface

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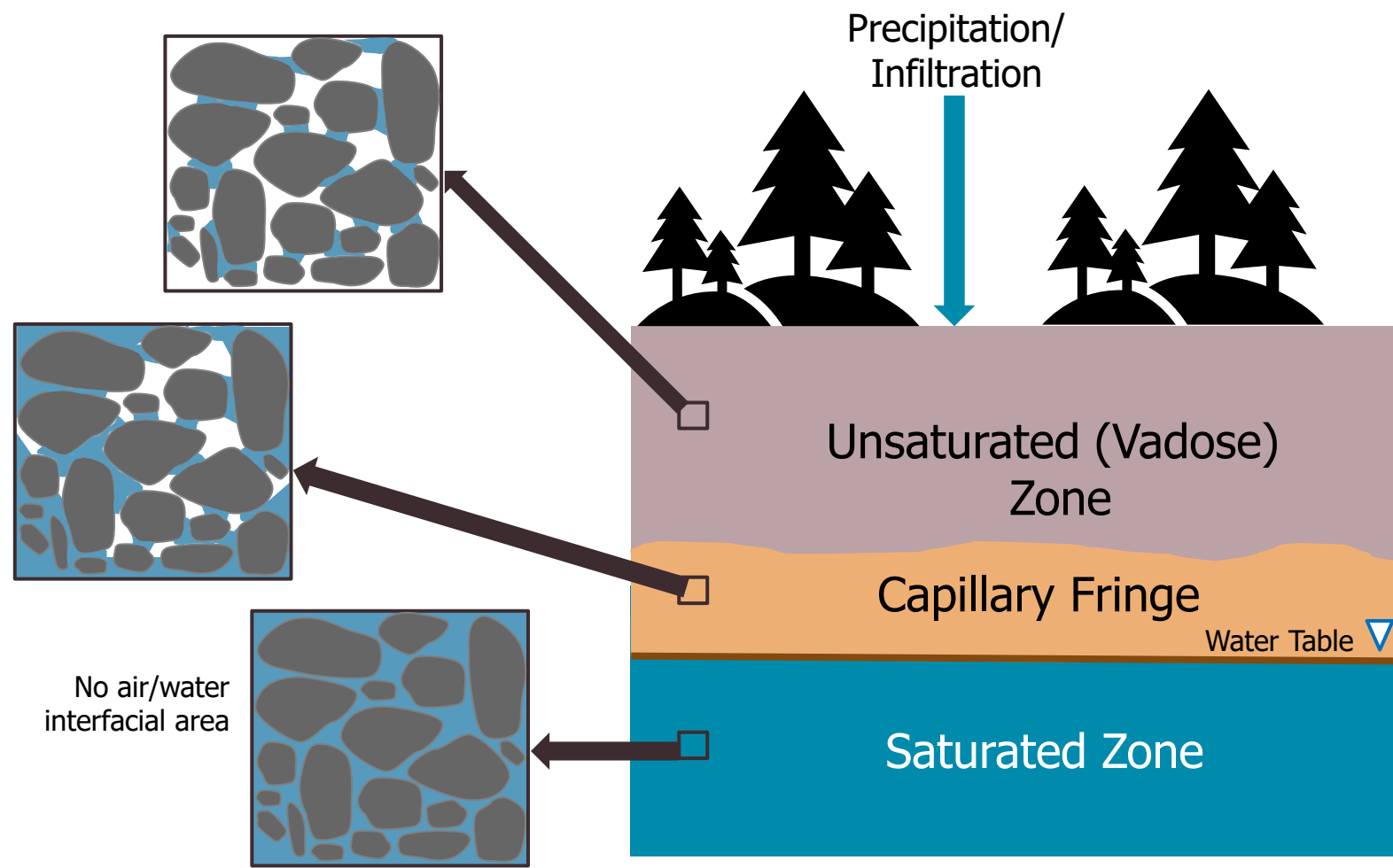
PFAAs have a greater affinity than traditional surfactants

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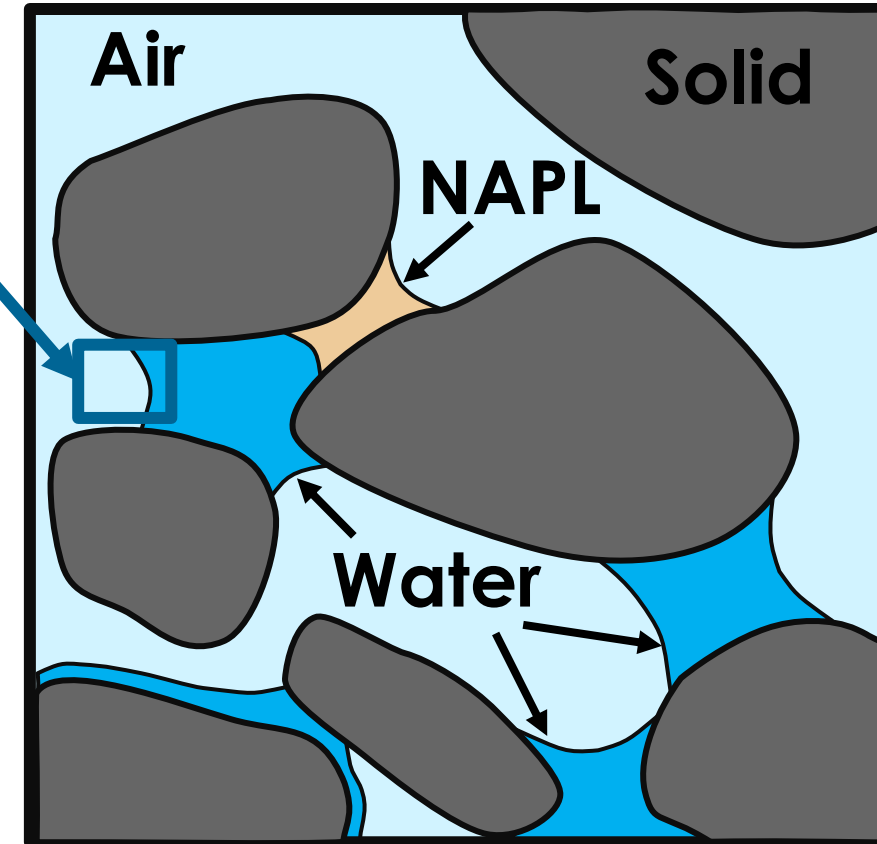
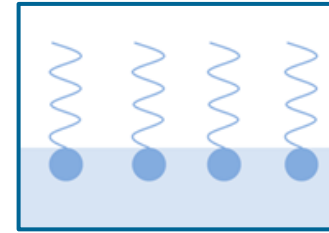
# PFAA Partitioning Depends on the Amount of Interfacial Area



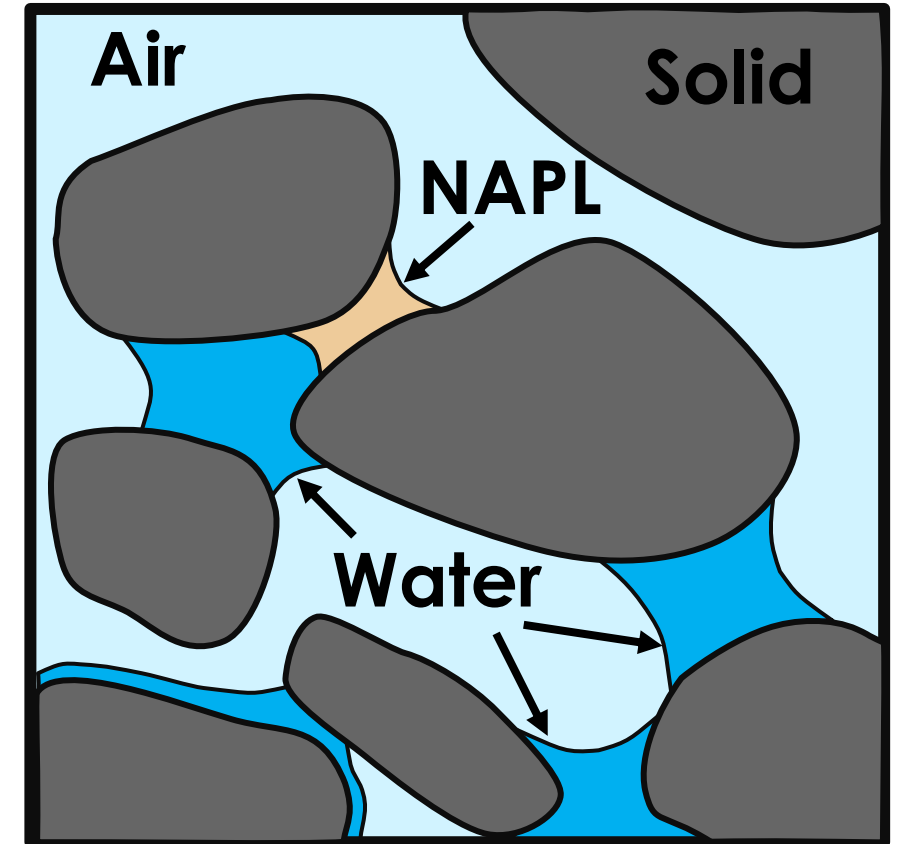
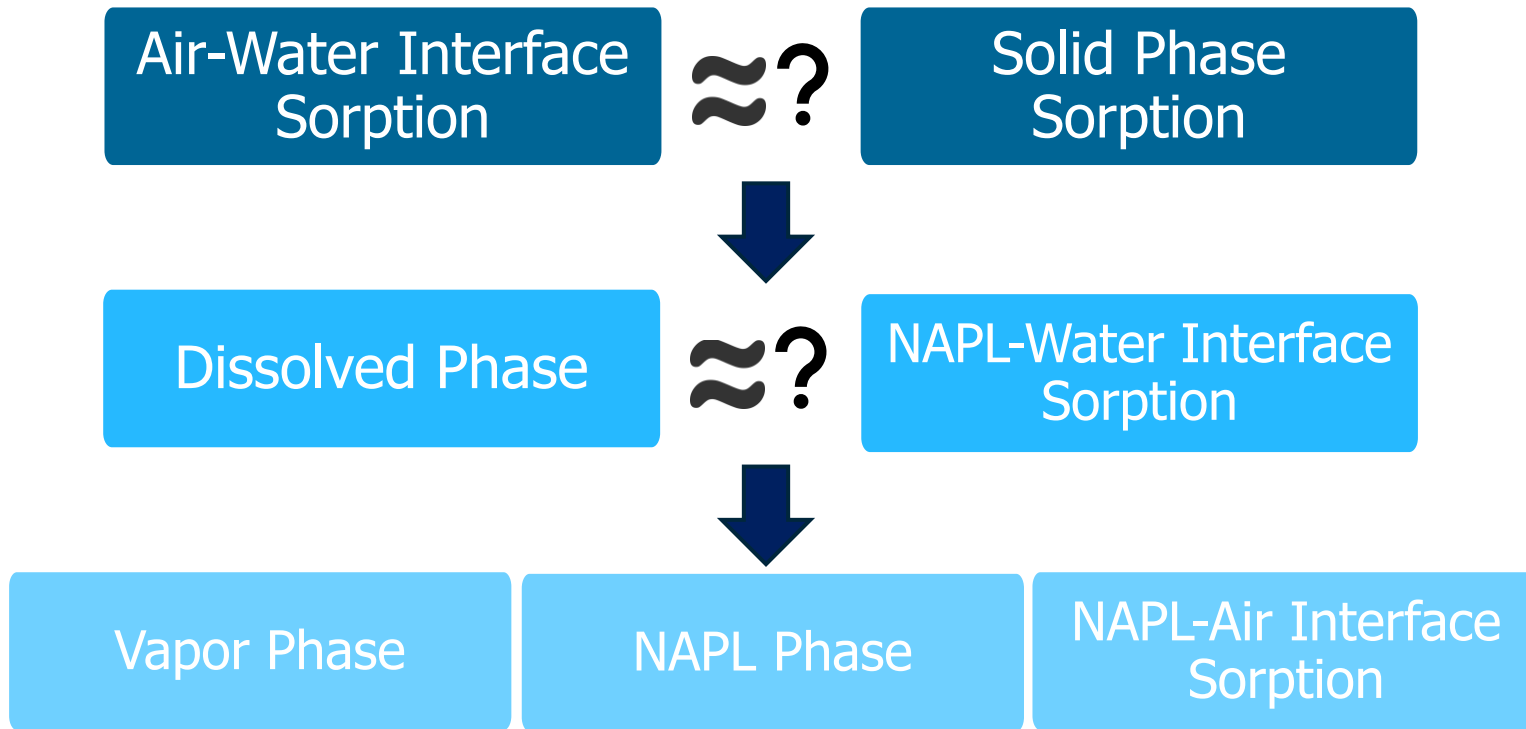
- Degree of water saturation affects the amount of interfacial area (nonlinear)
- Larger interfacial area enhances PFAA retention
- Factors affecting A-W interfacial area:
  - Soil type
  - Grain size
  - Heterogeneity
  - Organic Content

# Studies/Support

- Many studies have shown that PFAAs can be highly enriched at the air-water interface
  - Enrichment increases with alkyl chain length
  - Concentration dependent
    - Nonlinear, inverse relationship
  - Increases with dissolved solids concentration
  - Dependent on extent of air-water interfacial area
- Studies point to long term retention in the vadose zone
- Relative importance of air-water interface partitioning is site specific



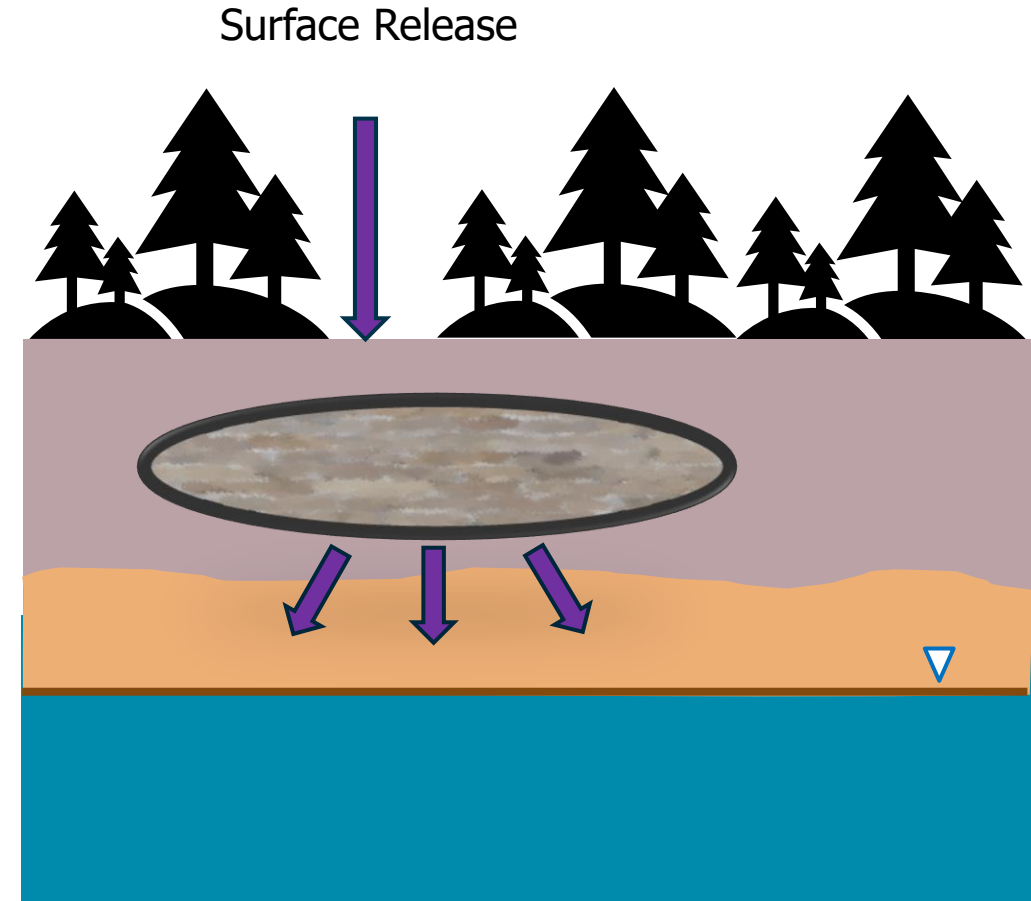
# Micro-Scale Factors Influencing PFAS Retention



***Highly dependent on site conditions,  
concentration, PFAS compound, and other factors***

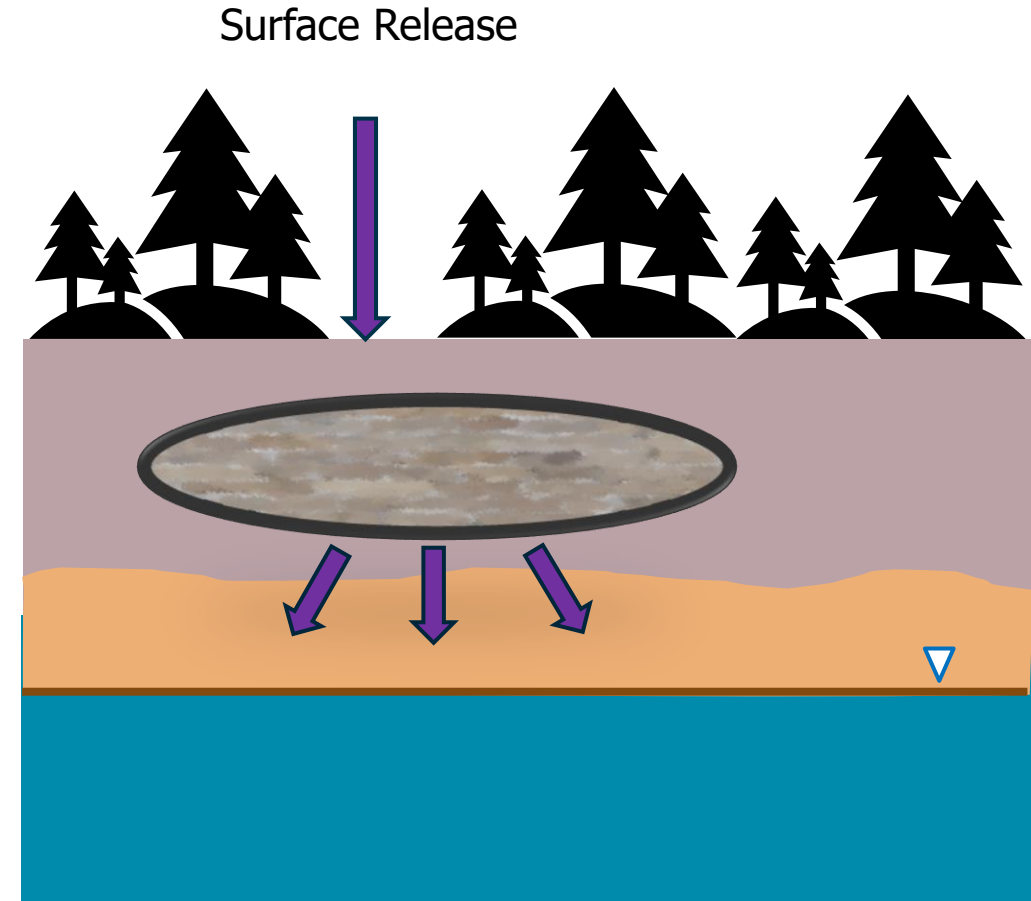
# Modeling

- Several researchers are developing models to understand fate and transport in the vadose zone
  - Consideration of air-water interfacial retention increases predictive accuracy
  - Highly dependent on prediction of site factors like air-water interfacial area
- Data gaps:
  - Role of micelle/hemimicelle formation
  - Other non-PFAA PFAS



# Implications

- Transport of PFAS through the vadose zone after surface releases is an evolving topic
- Air-water interfacial sorption is likely a large contributor to vadose zone retention
  - Significant vadose zone retention is likely after a surface release like biosolids application
  - Creates a source zone that can contribute to groundwater on a long-term basis
- Still many unknowns with PFAS vadose zone retention



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**Biosolids**

**Source Zones**

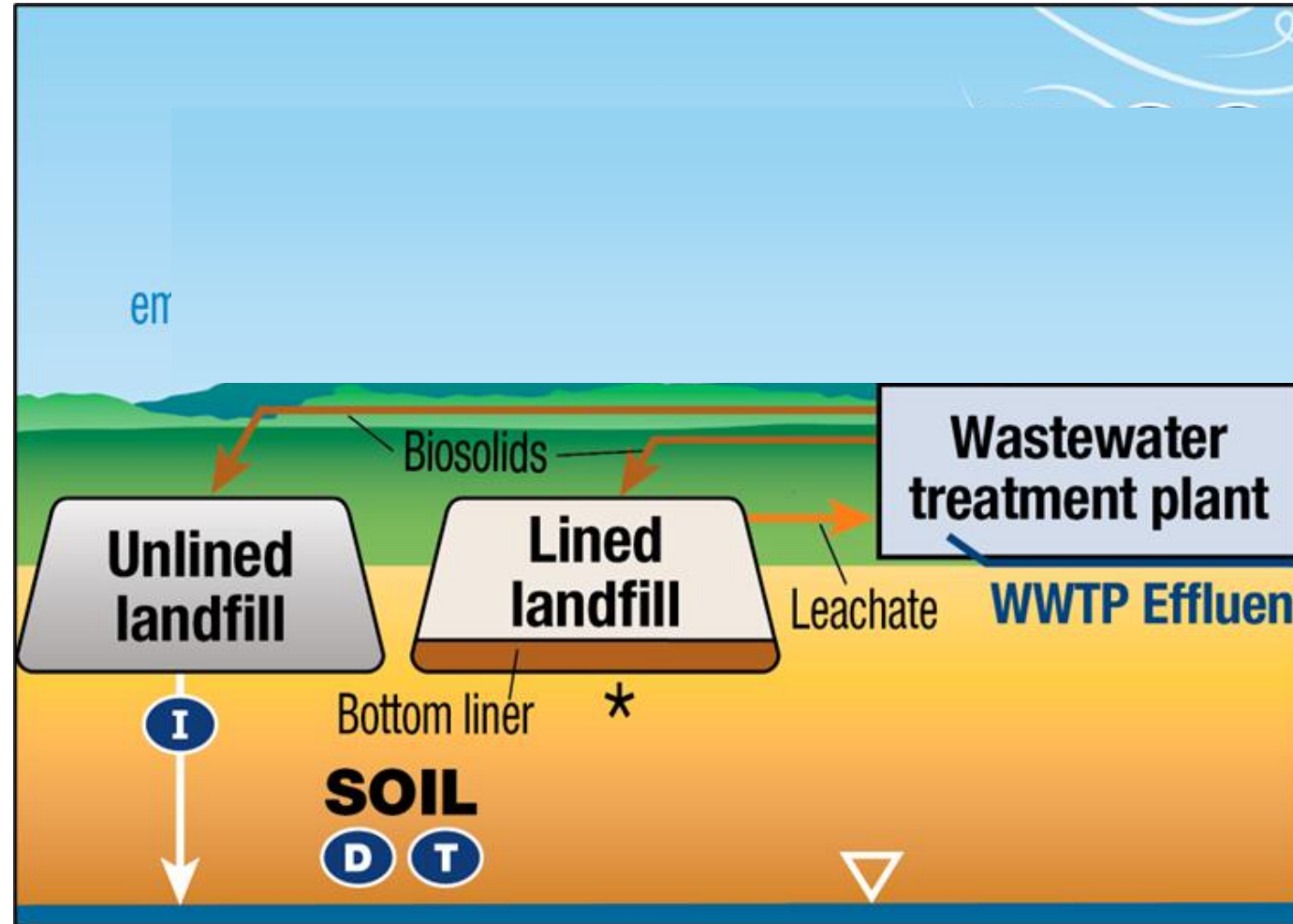
**Fate and Transport**

**Characterization and  
Treatment**

# Cycling of PFAS Related to Biosolids

Wastewater treatment plants (WWTP) generating biosolids daily

- Residential
- Commercial/Industrial wastewater
- Leachate from lined landfills
- Inputs from pumping of residential septic tanks



\*Leachate release from lined landfills could occur in the event of a liner leak

KEY A Atmospheric Deposition D Diffusion/Dispersion/Advection I Infiltration T Transformation of precursors (abiotic/biotic)

PFAS-1, Figure 2-22. CSM for landfills and WWTPs.

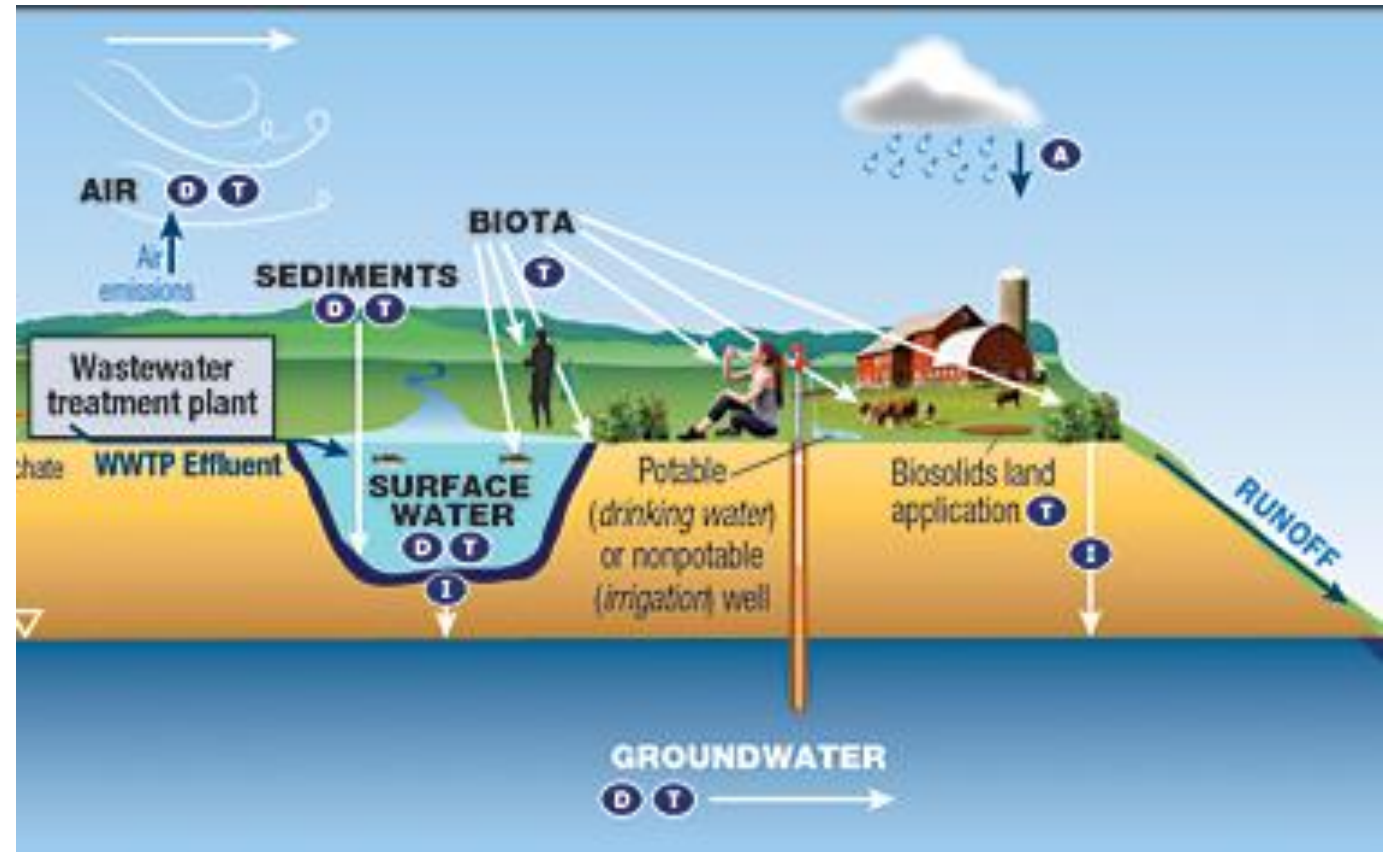
Source: Adapted from figure by L. Trozzolo, TRC, used with permission



# Cycling of PFAS Related to Biosolids

Land application leaching may impact

- Crops
- Drinking water
- Dairy
- Meat
- Waterways and Fish

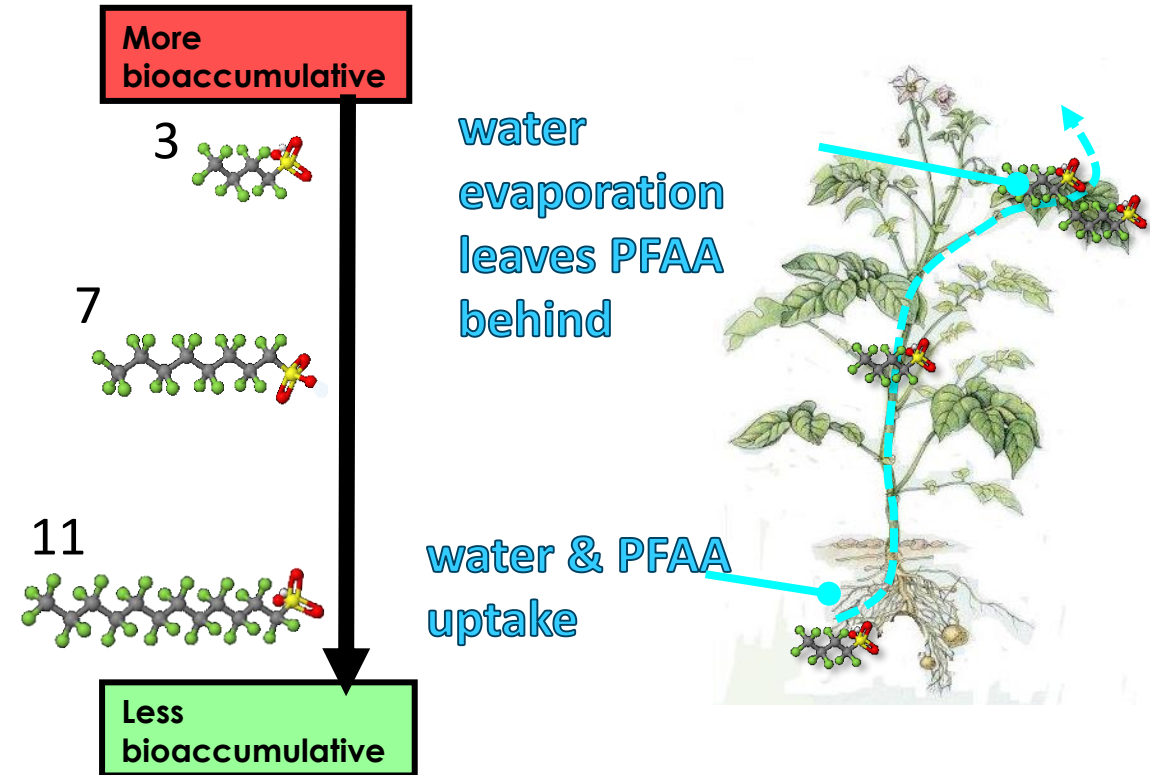


\*Leachate release from lined landfills could occur in the event of a liner leak

KEY A Atmospheric Deposition D Diffusion/Dispersion/Advection I Infiltration T Transformation of precursors (abiotic/biotic)

# PFAS Uptake in Plants

- High solubility of PFAS and hydrophilic functional group means plants can readily absorb PFAS in water or contaminated soil
- Bioconcentration factor (BCFs)
  - $BCF = C(\text{plant}) / C(\text{soil})$
  - Values range from  $\sim 0.01$  to 1000; but typically 0.1 to 10 ( $\sim 70\%$ )
- Greater concentrations in watery tissues (e.g., lettuce leaf, tomato fruit)



See Table 5-2 for list of bioconcentration factors

# PFAS Uptake in Animals

- Dairy cows and other livestock may be exposed to PFAS from feed or water supply
- Aquatic animals exposed through runoff from fields
- Bind to proteins in blood, liver, and kidneys
- PFAS bioaccumulation
  - Long-chain PFAS generally accumulate more and have longer elimination half lives
  - PFSAs > PFCAs
  - Biomagnification up food chain
  - Precursor transformation

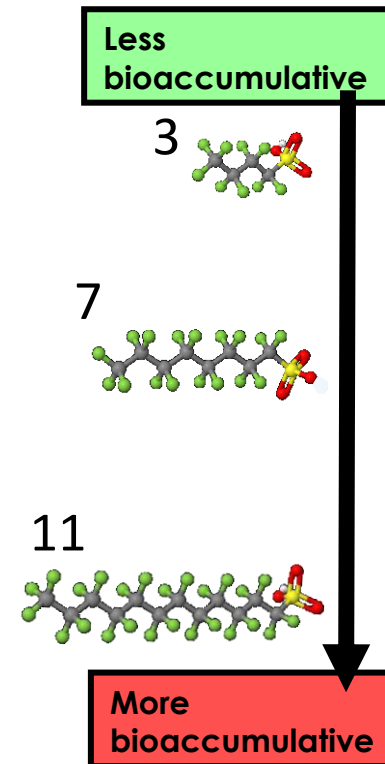
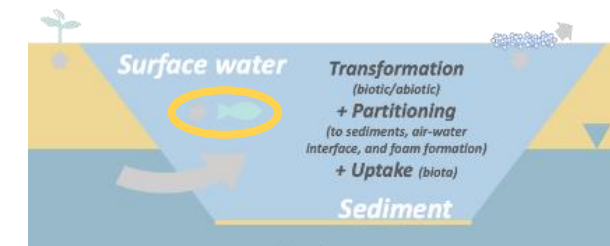


Photo by Frans de Wit licensed under <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/#>



PFAS-1, modified from Figure 5-1. Source: D. Adamson, GSI, used with permission.

# Biosolids and PFAS Fate and Transport in the Vadose Zone

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**Source Zones**

**Fate and Transport**

**Characterization and  
Treatment**

**Biosolids**



# Site Investigations – Land-Applied Biosolids

## General considerations

- Historical records
  - Record keeping varies; potential unidentified sources?
- Large application areas
- Transport potential
  - Receptors/pathways
- Other nearby sources
- Risk communication



Photo Source: C. Evans, ME DEP. Used with permission

# Site Investigations – Land-Applied Biosolids

## Site-sampling considerations

- Application
  - Liquid or solid; soils possibly tilled
- Potentially sampled media
  - Source biosolids, soils, groundwater, pore water, surface water
- Transport potential
  - Surface runoff or infiltration
  - Pooling in low areas - PFAS accumulation?
- General PFAS-sampling protocols
- Appropriate analytical methods
  - 1633 appropriate for biosolids & soils
  - Fingerprinting/source ID; Would “total” PFAS data be useful?



Photo Source: C. Evans, ME DEP. Used with permission

PFAS-1, Section 10. Site Characterization; Section 11. Sampling and Analysis; Section 14. Risk Characterization

# Biosolids Treatment-Disposal

## Land Application

- Regulated/permit-limited process
- Application rates tied to nutrient management at farms
- Potential for leaching to groundwater or uptake

## Landfilling

- Considerations include capacity of facilities
- Landfill leachate may be sent to WWTP

## Incineration

- Recent studies document 99+% destruction effectiveness
- Potential concerns re: incomplete combustion
- *...other destructive methods in development: Supercritical Water Oxidation (SCWO), pyrolysis*



[Iain Thompson / Cathkin Landfill Site, CC BY-SA 2.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons



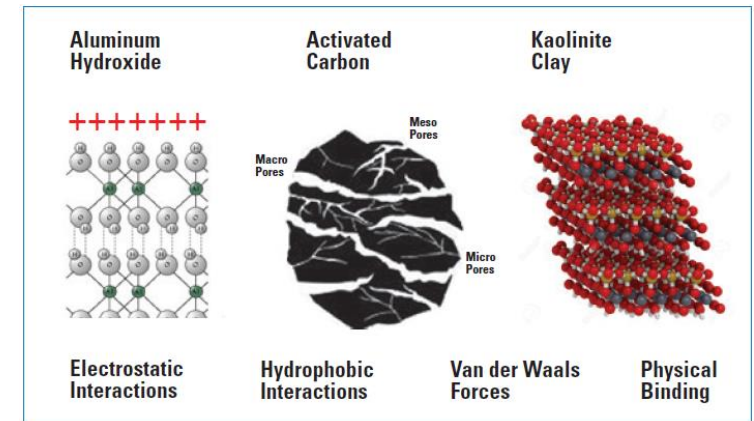
Photo from: <http://clui.org/ludb/site/east-liverpool-hazardous-waste-incinerator>.



# Biosolids Treatment – Disposal

## Soil stabilization/sorption

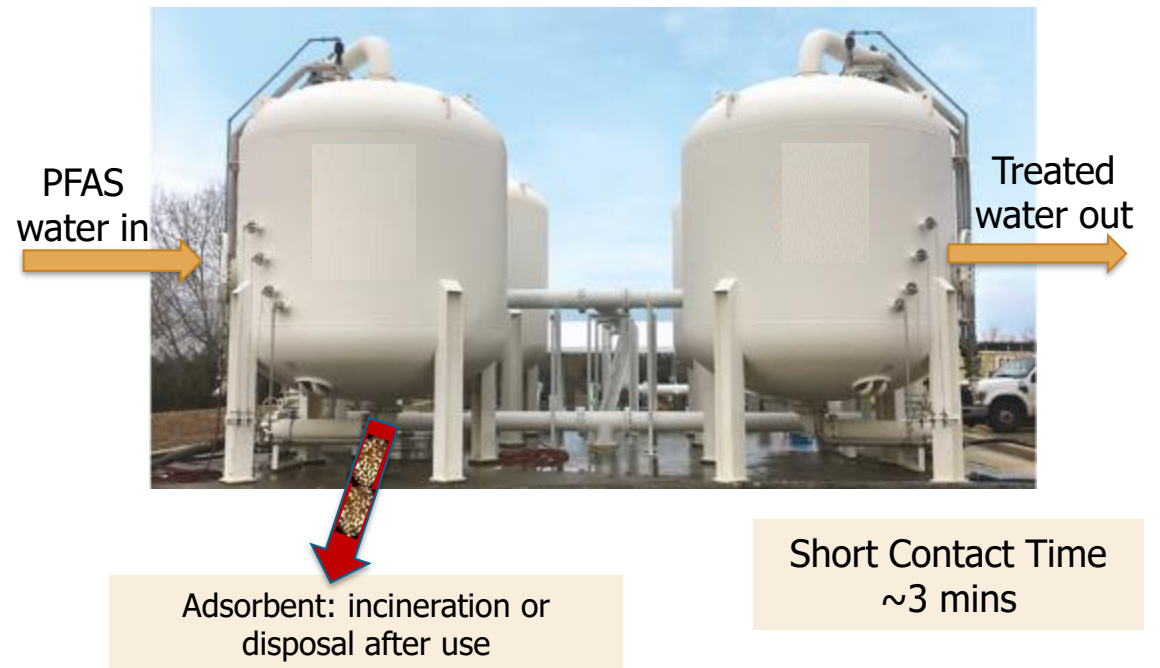
- Amendments to reduce PFAS release from solid media
- Established technology being adapted for PFAS
- Recent studies document reductions in PFAS leaching
- Scalable to biosolids and/or land-applied soils?
- Limitation: PFAS are not removed/destroyed



Images courtesy of Ziltek™ and AquaBlok Ltd.  
Used with permission.

# Biosolids Treatment – Disposal

- Elimination of upstream sources to WWTP
- Treatment or reduction at WWTP prior to biosolids generation
  - GAC, ion exchange resin
  - Foam fractionation or other concentration methods
  - Pre-treatment for BOD, etc.



PFAS-1, Section 2.6.4 Wastewater Treatment, Treatment Residuals and Biosolids.  
Table 12-1 Treatment Methods Table

Graphic used with permission, Scott Grieco, adapted from Stew Abrams and Purolite.  
Photo used with permission, Francis Boodoo, Purolite.

# Biosolids and PFAS Fate and Transport in the Vadose Zone

Source Zone  
Characteristics

Vadose Zone  
Controls on  
Mobility

Field Scale Fate,  
Transport, Uptake

Characterization  
and Treatment

## Additional Biosolids Considerations & Summary

**Biosolids**

**Source Zones**

**Fate and Transport**

**Characterization and  
Treatment**

# PFAS Regulatory Environment

New & pending Federal regulations may affect management of biosolids

Inputs to  
WWTPs

Transportation

Disposal

Lower  
screening  
values

See the ITRC PFAS Regulatory Programs Table; Section 8.2

# PFAS Regulatory Environment

## USEPA Strategic Roadmap 2021-2024

- Includes future reductions in allowed PFAS in NPDES permitted discharges
  - EPA memo (December 2022) provides guidance for permit writers to include PFAS monitoring in discharge permits
- Risk Assessment for PFOA and PFOS in biosolids – winter 2024
- Maximum Contaminant Levels under the Safe Drinking Water Act (MCLs) for 6 PFAS
  - PFOS, PFOA at 4 ng/L (ppt)
  - PFHxS, PFNA, HFPO-DA (GenX) at 10 ng/L (ppt)
  - Hazard Index of 1.0 for 4 PFAS (PFNA, PFHxS, PFBS, GenX)

# Biosolids Testing for PFAS

## Standard Methods currently approved

- Most testing by a Modified 537.1 with some level isotope dilution
- Method 1633 completing multi-lab verification **now final**
- Others – ASTM D8421-22

## Standard reporting lists limited; other techniques required to report additional precursors and “non-target” PFAS

- TOP
- AOF
- High Res MS

# State-Level Response to PFAS in Biosolids

## Environmental Council of States (ECOS) study on PFAS in Biosolids

Published [January 2023](#)

Survey, 34 states responded





# Joint Principles for Preventing and Managing PFAS in Biosolids

- Protect communities
- Reduce presence in wastewater
- Preserve flexibility and use, prioritize public health
- Ensure safety of food supply, support impacted farmers/ranchers
- Educate stakeholders/communicate risk
- Build capacity
- Embrace transparency and innovation



Published [July 2023](#)

# Final Points

PFAS are associated with wastewater & biosolids due to decades of widespread production/use

After biosolids(or AFFF) land application PFAS tend to be retained in shallow soils

- May gradually leach to GW or be taken up by plants

Biosolids treatment involves destruction of biosolids or removal of PFAS before biosolids production

Biosolids have been regulated for decades; PFAS/biosolids regulations are evolving

# ITRC PFAS Resources

ITRC PFAS: <https://pfas-1.itrcweb.org/>

Guidance Document

13 Fact Sheets

External Tables

## PFAS Introductory Training

- Clu-In Archive: <https://www.clu-in.org/conf/itrc/PFAS-Introductory/>

## Other video resources

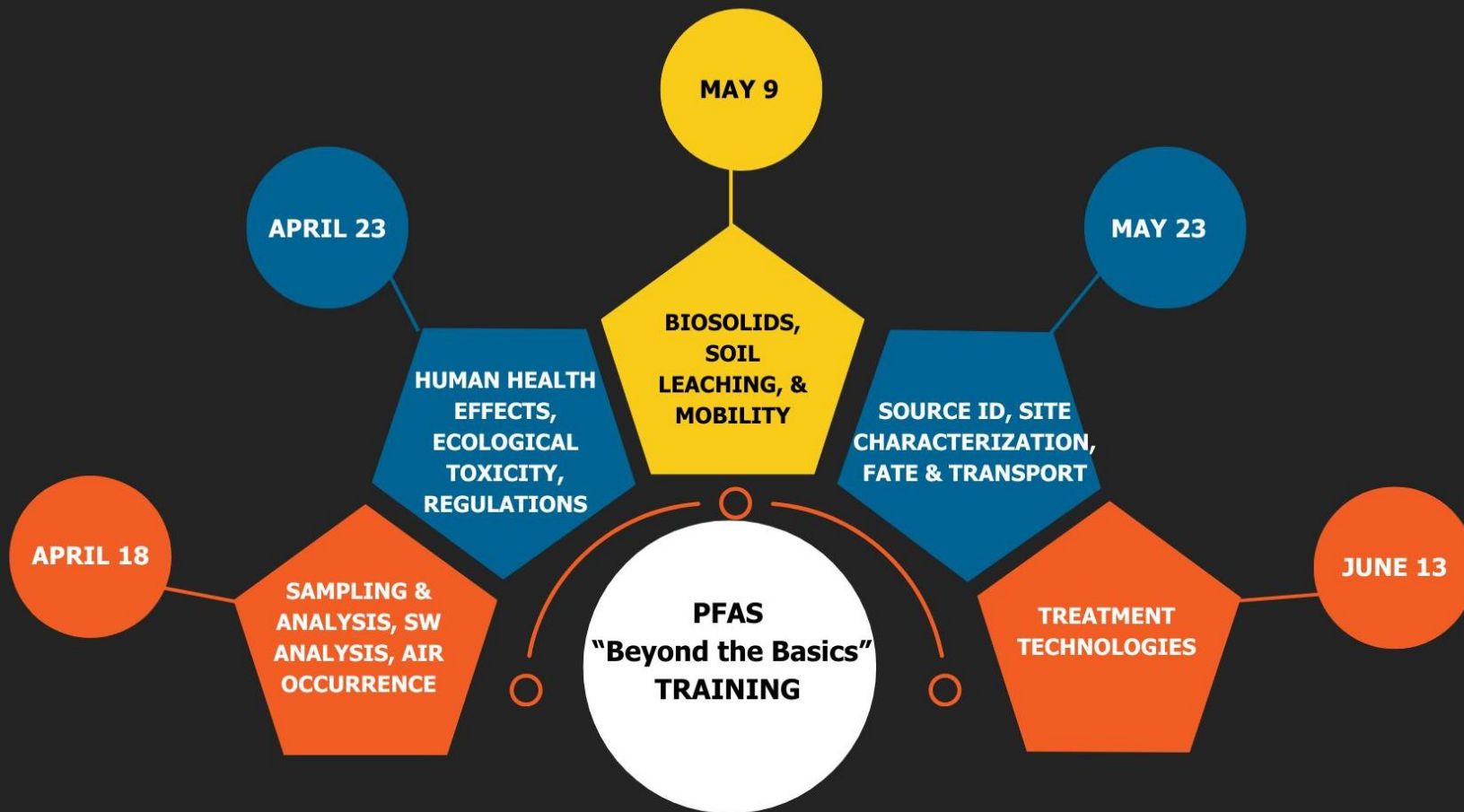
- Available through links on: <https://pfas-1.itrcweb.org>
- Quick Explainer Videos
- Longer PFAS Training Modules
- Archived Roundtable Sessions

# Questions



## Feedback Form & Certificate:

[www.clu-in.org/conf/itrc/PFAS-BTB-Biosolids](http://www.clu-in.org/conf/itrc/PFAS-BTB-Biosolids)



<https://pfas-1.itrcweb.org/>