

# C8: one of thousands

Business



It's 1951. DuPont introduces the use of another new chemical, called PFOA or C8, in their products. C8 has that name because of the eight-carbon chain that makes up its core. Its full chemical formula is  $C_8HF_{15}O_2$ . Because of the strong chemical bond between carbon and fluorine, it's very resistant to degradation. DuPont uses it to help Teflon not clump together during production, but eventually its applications will become far more widespread. It made its way into the air, the soil, and the water of the surrounding areas. DuPont begins to be concerned about the health effects of C8 in 1954. In 1961, they tested rats and found that C8 caused their livers to grow, a sign of having been exposed to a toxin. They replicated these results with dogs a year later. In 1978, the company that makes C8, 3M, found more proof of its toxicity by studying its workers. In the same year, DuPont found that there were high concentrations of C8 in their workers' blood.

They did not tell the workers this. In 1981, a DuPont worker survey showed that 2 out of 7, or 28% of babies born to women working in their Teflon Division, where workers are exposed to C8, had birth defects. One child in particular underwent thirty corrective surgeries for facial defects. DuPont removed all women from the Teflon Division after learning this. In 1984, DuPont looked at the possible contamination of the environment, found contamination, and concluded that ceasing use of C8 is not 'economically attractive'. They did nothing to stop the environmental contamination and did not tell the public.

In 1999, DuPont was worried about dumping C8-laced sludge along the Ohio River. They began dumping the contaminated sludge in an unlined landfill

known as Dry Run Landfill, on land they purchased from the Tennant family. The landfill has a creek running through it, called Dry Run Creek. Dry Run Creek passes through Wilbur Tennant's land, and his cows that drank from the creek were dying, 280 of them, from mysterious causes. He sued DuPont.

In 2000, 3M stopped making C8 because they were concerned about the health effects, and the EPA had begun to investigate C8. It was showing up almost everywhere, so they thought a phase-out was inevitable. They anticipated regulations in the future and decided to distance themselves from the chemical. In 2001, DuPont settled with Wilbur Tennant for an undisclosed sum, but his lawyer, Rob Billott, was not satisfied. He filed a class-action suit against DuPont, on behalf of those who lived along a C8-contaminated river, and provided the EPA with DuPont's internal docs on C8. In 2002, the EPA began reviewing the use of C8.

However, it remains completely unregulated to this day. In 2005 DuPont settled the \$300 million class action suit for those affected by C8, and the EPA fined them \$10 million for negligence with C8. The settlement had a few parts: it made DuPont fund a health study of people who were at risk, it made them construct filtration plants to filter C8 out of water, and any individual in the class-action with a disease that had been found to be linked with C8 could file a personal injury claim, one at a time, without having to prove that it was DuPont's fault. More than 3, 500 personal injury claims are making their way through the court system, currently at a rate of 40 per year. It will take around 70 years now for these claims to finish, even as more people are diagnosed with these conditions each day. In 2006 DuPont <https://assignbuster.com/c8-one-of-thousands/>

and eight other multinational companies agreed to phase out use of C8 by 2015.

But the disaster isn't over, because C8 takes 20-25 years to fully clear from the body, even if you don't take in any more of it, and it stays in the environment for thousands of years. It is estimated that the safety level for C8 is 10 parts per trillion, or 0.000001 parts per million. In Wisconsin alone, 30,000 people are drinking water with more than that in it. Over the nation around 3,000,000 are. DuPont agreed in 2005 to switch from C8 to a safer alternative, which they market as GenX.

However, scientists don't actually think it's any safer. DuPont's own reports show that, according to physician Alan Ducatman, "the chemical has the same trio of biological effects — on the liver, immunity, and the processing of fats — seen with similar chemicals, including C8." It doesn't remain in the body as long, however. Now, DuPont has split all of its C8 and GenX factories and, also, legal responsibilities into a new, smaller company called Chemours, and it is speculated that they are planning other legal maneuvers to avoid further responsibility from their contamination. Economists believe that Chemours was designed to go bankrupt before C8 claims were settled.

We happen to know about C8 because of the Tennant case, but there are thousands of other unregulated chemicals that we don't know about and that may be just as toxic.