PFAS REMOVAL

CHALLENGES IN WATER TREATMENT

David R. Jones, Ph.D.

Chief Research Officer

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What are some of the challenges and limitations of current technologies for the **removal of PFAS** in water treatment?

PFAS

PFAS are also known as "forever chemicals" because they do not break down easily in the environment and can accumulate over time. PFAS are used in a wide range of packaging, industrial, and consumer products for their water- and grease-resistant properties. However, concerns about the potential health and environmental impacts of PFAS are growing. Studies have linked exposure to certain PFAS compounds to medical issues such as cancer, developmental problems, and immune system dysfunction.

Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) are known for their persistence and resistance to degradation and pose a significant challenge for water treatment technologies. While various methods exist, they face limitations that hinder their widespread and effective implementation. **Here are the key challenges:**

Effectiveness:

- **Incomplete Removal:** Most existing technologies like Granular Activated Carbon (GAC) and Ion Exchange (IX) effectively remove some PFAS, but they struggle with the entire spectrum, particularly newer, shorter-chain varieties.
- **Limited Destruction:** Many methods merely concentrate PFAS, transferring them to another medium like filters or concentrated brine, requiring further disposal, raising additional concerns.

Cost and Scalability:

- **High Implementation Costs:** Technologies like Electrocatalytic Oxidation (EO) and Plasma Treatment are promising for destruction, but their high initial investment and operational costs limit their feasibility for large-scale applications.
- **Maintenance and Regeneration:** GAC and IX require frequent replacement, adding to long-term costs. Scaling up promising but complex technologies like EO presents logistical and economic hurdles.

More PFAS Removal Challenges

Complexity and Selectivity:

- Complex Water Matrices: PFAS removal in real-world scenarios with various co-contaminants and complex water compositions requires adjustments and pretreatment, increasing complexity and cost.

- Specificity Challenges: Developing PFAS-specific sorbents or membranes is crucial for efficient removal without affecting other essential water components.

Sustainability and Environmental Impact:

- Waste Disposal: Concentrated brine or spent filter media from some methods pose disposal challenges, potentially shifting environmental risks elsewhere.

- Energy Consumption: Some technologies, like EO, require significant energy input, raising concerns about their sustainability and carbon footprint.

Regulation and Standardization:

- Evolving Regulations: Rapidly evolving PFAS regulations and health advisories can create uncertainty for utilities and treatment technology developers.

- Standardized Testing: Lack of standardized testing methods for different PFAS types and complex water matrices hinders accurate evaluation and comparison of treatment technologies.

Water Treatment Technologies

Conventional **activated carbon adsorption**, although effective, has long equilibrium times and poor performance in adsorbing short-chain PFAS, as well as compromised adsorption in the presence of other organic compounds.

In this article, the authors identify critical knowledge gaps on the pyrolysis of biosolids that must be addressed to assess the effectiveness of PFAS removal during pyrolysis treatment.

Sorptive removal of short-chain perfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) during drinking water treatment using activated carbon and anion exchanger

High Pressure Membrane Method

Nanofiltration, while scalable and cost-effective, cannot typically reduce PFAS concentrations below current drinking-water recommendations.

In this paper, a mixed-matrix-composite nanofiltration (MMCNF) membrane was developed to enhance PFAS removal by adding β-cyclodextrin microparticles.

Efficient PFOA removal from drinking water by a dual-functional mixed-matrix-composite nanofiltration membrane

Activated Carbon Treatment Technology

In situ remedial approaches for groundwater treatment using **sorptive media** have been limited to downgradient treatment, with treatment within the source zones being unfeasible.

In this article, a solution of colloidal activated carbon (CAC) was injected at the air-water interface within the source zone at a PFAS contamination site using direct push technology.

The in situ treatment of PFAS within porewater at the air–water interface of a PFAS source zone

Pyrolysis Thermal Treatment Technology

Pyrolysis, a promising technology for PFAS removal from biosolids, still has significant unknowns regarding PFAS and transformation product fates in pyrolysis products and emissions

In this article, the authors identify critical knowledge gaps on the pyrolysis of biosolids that must be addressed to assess the effectiveness of PFAS removal during pyrolysis treatment.

Burning questions: Current practices and critical gaps in evaluating removal of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) during pyrolysis treatments of biosolids

These limitations highlight the need for further research and development of technologies that can overcome these challenges and effectively remove PFAS from water sources.

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