

Reporters note: Minnesota based 3M discontinued making PFOA in 2000. One of the rumors in the research community was the company had to be persuaded by a Michigan State University researcher John Geisy. I asked Geisy, via email, about the rumors. He said they were completely unfounded, and sent this response:

"3M came to me and asked if I would work cooperatively with them to answer questions that they had about perfluoro compounds. The studies done thereafter were a progression as we obtained better and better methods and we answered questions. It is true that I suggested that we look into the potential toxicity and mechanisms of action and to develop structure-activity relationships as we also looked into better and better chemical methods and conducted global surveys to determine of PFCs were in the environment and if so what the magnitudes of exposure were and how wide-spread the distribution was. These studies were conducted by 3M, our laboratory or contract laboratories and in co-operations between our lab and the US EPA and also with contract laboratories.

The first environmental samples that we looked at were blood samples from eagles that I had collected as part of a joint program with the US FWS.

Until the late 19990 there were no methods suitable to investigate the occurrence of PFCs at environmentally relevant concentrations. The technical group at 3M were leaders in developing these methods. They were very supportive of our studies and never limited what we could do with the unrestricted grant that Michigan State Received from 3M to support our studies. We were not limited in what we reported at meetings or in publications. Our only restriction was that 3M asked that we share all of our information with the US EPA as soon as possible. So we did that. As soon as we would finish a study, we would send it to the US EPA and they would post it on their web site.

While 3M would ask me my opinion about technical issues of analytical chemistry, environmental fate and toxicology, the decision to faze out most uses of PFOS-based compounds what theirs in conjunction with the US EPA. So I can not say how much the results of our studies had on that decision, but I am sure that the decision was a function of the knowledge gained over a fairly short period of time. Within a year, we were able to conduct a global survey and conduct simple tests of toxicity that provided insights into the potential effects of PFOS so that the decision was made.

I hope that gives you some insight into the co-opearative nature of our studies with 3M. We are currently looking into improved methods of detection of a wider range of PFCs in environmental samples under an unrestricted gift from 3M to the University of Saskatchewan. These funds support the studies of one of my graduate students. At this point, we have less contact with 3M, but they do give us technical assistance from time to time and have provided access to their instruments, which are newer and somewhat more sensitive than the instruments I have at the U of S. Otherwise, we do our work and publish our papers. We are currently working on a joint manuscript with some of the chemists at 3M on accurate measurements of several PFS in human blood. I am also working with a number of laboratories in Canada, Sweden and China on PFC-related projects that are not being done in conjunction with 3M.

In my dealings with 3M I found them to be very open, completely honest and sincerely wanting to do the right thing for all involved."