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Michael Hawthorne, Investigative Reporter, Chicago Tribune

A discussion about the impact of PFAS and the state of journalism in American

Michael Hawthorne

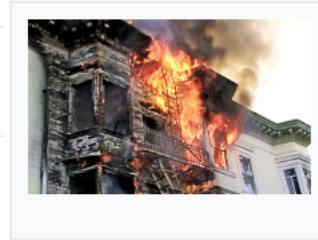


‘TOXIC HOT SEAT’ EXPOSES THE POISONS IN EVERYONE’S HOMES

By [Cynthia Fuchs](#) / 25 November 2013

“Every reform at some point needs a reform.”

— Governor Jerry Brown



“That mindset,” says Michael Hawthorne, “This is the world we live in, that one of the consequences of modern living is having chemicals in our body.” Hawthorne’s observation in [Toxic Hot Seat](#) follows a clip from one of DuPont’s television advertisements extolling the virtues of chemicals in our body: a quartet of dancers in white jackets and dresses move in vintage unison about a stage, singing, “Better things for better living through chemistry.”

The dated nature of both the ad and the sentiment is clear in the increasingly blurred out image and the so-square chorus. As Hawthorne suggests, however, public assumptions about chemicals have both changed and remained the same: then, they were promoted and sold, now, they just are — and still sold, whether consumers are aware of what they’re purchasing or not. Following on the work of Hawthorne and his fellow [Chicago Tribune investigative reporters](#) Patricia Callahan and Sam Roe, [Toxic Hot Seat](#) looks at the marketing and effects of a particular set of chemicals, those found in flame retardant furniture.



The Pulitzer Prizes

The 2013 Pulitzer Prize Finalist in Investigative Reporting

Finalist: Patricia Callahan, Sam Roe and Michael Hawthorne of *Chicago Tribune*

For their exposure of manufacturers that imperil public health by continuing to use toxic fire retardants in household furniture and crib mattresses, triggering reform efforts at the state and national level.



Forever chemicals: They’re in your drinking water and likely your food. Read the Tribune investigation

In Illinois, there is no requirement to test sludge for PFAS before it’s spread as fertilizer, nor limits on chemical concentrations in soil.

By Michael Hawthorne • October 20, 2022



How to reduce your exposure to PFAS: Avoid microwave popcorn, water-resistant makeup, nonstick pans

Government officials and nonprofit groups offer suggestions about products to avoid.

By Michael Hawthorne • September 10, 2022



Tribune investigation: Chicago’s sewage district fails to warn gardeners free sludge contains toxic forever chemicals

The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District disregarded studies finding PFAS in food grown in its compost and downplayed health risks, documents show.

By Michael Hawthorne • September 11, 2022



The origin of these highly toxic man-made chemicals

Discovered in 1938, PFAS have proliferated in household products and only today are stringent regulations being considered.

By Michael Hawthorne • July 10, 2022



Citing environmental racism, Southeast Side activists file civil rights complaint against Chicago: ‘We’ve been a dumping ground for too many years’

The chief target of the complaint is General Iron, a scrap shredder that plans to move from Lincoln Park on the North Side to a site on the Calumet River in the East Side neighborhood.

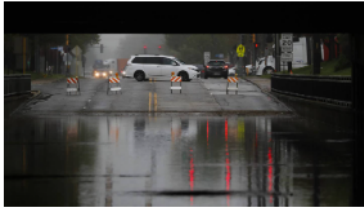
By Michael Hawthorne • August 13, 2020



Chicago air is dirtier in July than smog-choked Los Angeles. More bad air is forecast.

After missing out on cleaner air during the coronavirus lockdown, the Chicago area just suffered its longest streak of high-pollution days in more than a decade.

By Michael Hawthorne • July 10, 2020



Heavy rain overwhelms \$3 billion Deep Tunnel again, forcing sewage into Lake Michigan

Heavy rain overwhelms Chicago's \$3 billion Deep Tunnel again, forcing sewage into Lake Michigan.

By Michael Hawthorne • May 15, 2020



Sewage may help predict future virus outbreaks. Chicago researchers aim to test hundreds or thousands of manholes at a time.

Collecting samples from municipal sewers on a regular basis could give cities early warnings about where the disease is spreading.

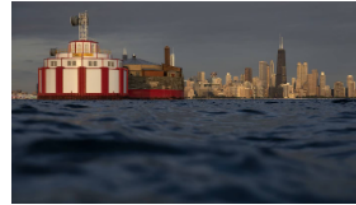
By Michael Hawthorne • May 30, 2020



Persistent farmer whose cows died from a mysterious disease helped unravel the origin of toxic chemicals

'There is something wrong with this water.' Videotape shows emaciated cows with tumors on their hides.

By Michael Hawthorne • July 11, 2022



More than 8 million Illinoisans get drinking water from a utility where forever chemicals have been detected, Tribune investigation finds

Two of the most studied PFAS are so toxic there is effectively no safe level of exposure, the U.S. EPA declared last month.

By Michael Hawthorne • July 12, 2022



Chicago ranks 3rd in US in deaths and health costs related to diesel pollution, analysis shows

A new analysis suggests a key reason why dirty air problems continued here while other cities saw clear skies for the first time in years: Pollution from diesel trucks and locomotives barely changed in the Chicago area, one of the nation's major freight hubs.

By Michael Hawthorne • January 20, 2022



A low-income Michigan city has a drinking water crisis. Sound familiar?

For decades this low-income, majority Black community — less than two hours from Chicago on the southeastern shore of Lake Michigan — has been ravaged by a litany of woes shared with many other once-thriving American cities. Now the water isn't safe to drink either.

By Michael Hawthorne • November 15, 2021

Toxic Tort Litigation

Concerns about the
Environment and Public
Health



More than a half century after 3M pioneered toxic forever chemicals, company pledges to stop making them by 2025

Lawyers and activists who have tangled with the company remain skeptical. Documents show top executives knew about the harmful effects of PFAS as early as the 1950s.

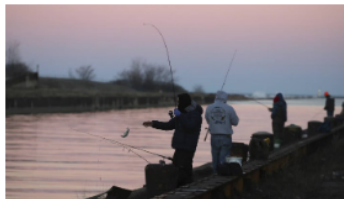
By Michael Hawthorne • December 20, 2022



Sterigenics settles hundreds of ethylene oxide lawsuits for \$408 million after jury hit company with \$363 million verdict for Willowbrook cancer survivor

The company said in a statement that settling the remaining Illinois lawsuits was in the best interest of its owners. It attributed the decision to “years of biased media coverage in the greater Chicago area,” the cost of appealing a record jury verdict and the time and money needed to defend hundreds of other claims.

By Michael Hawthorne • January 09, 2023



Freshwater fish are significantly more contaminated with toxic forever chemicals than saltwater fish and shellfish, analysis shows

The finding is based on an analysis of hundreds of fish caught by the U.S. EPA. Though it has concluded some of the chemicals are harmful at any level, the agency hasn’t drawn attention to its fish sampling or warned Americans they could be in danger.

By Michael Hawthorne • January 17, 2023



3 Chicago-area oil refineries that dump toxic chemicals into Lake Michigan and other waterways are among worst polluters in US, study shows

BP Whiting, ExxonMobil Joliet and Citgo in Lemont highlight the consequences of lax regulations, the Environmental Integrity Group analysis shows. Even when limits are in place, oil companies often pay minimal or no fines for violating the law.

By Michael Hawthorne • January 27, 2023

Illinois accuses 3M, DuPont, other manufacturers of contaminating state's drinking water and land with toxic forever chemicals

By Michael Hawthorne
Chicago Tribune • Feb 01, 2023 at 7:30 pm



Illinois accuses 3M, DuPont, other manufacturers of contaminating state's drinking water and land with toxic forever chemicals

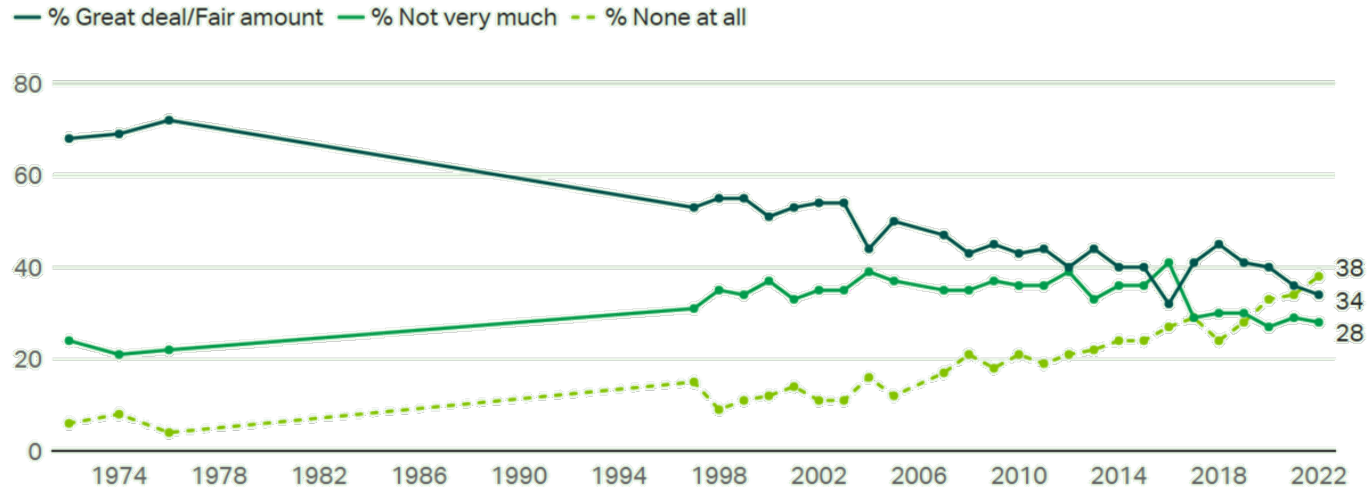
More than 8 million people in the state — 6 out of every 10 Illinoisans — get their drinking water from a utility where at least one forever chemical has been detected, a 2022 Chicago Tribune investigation found.

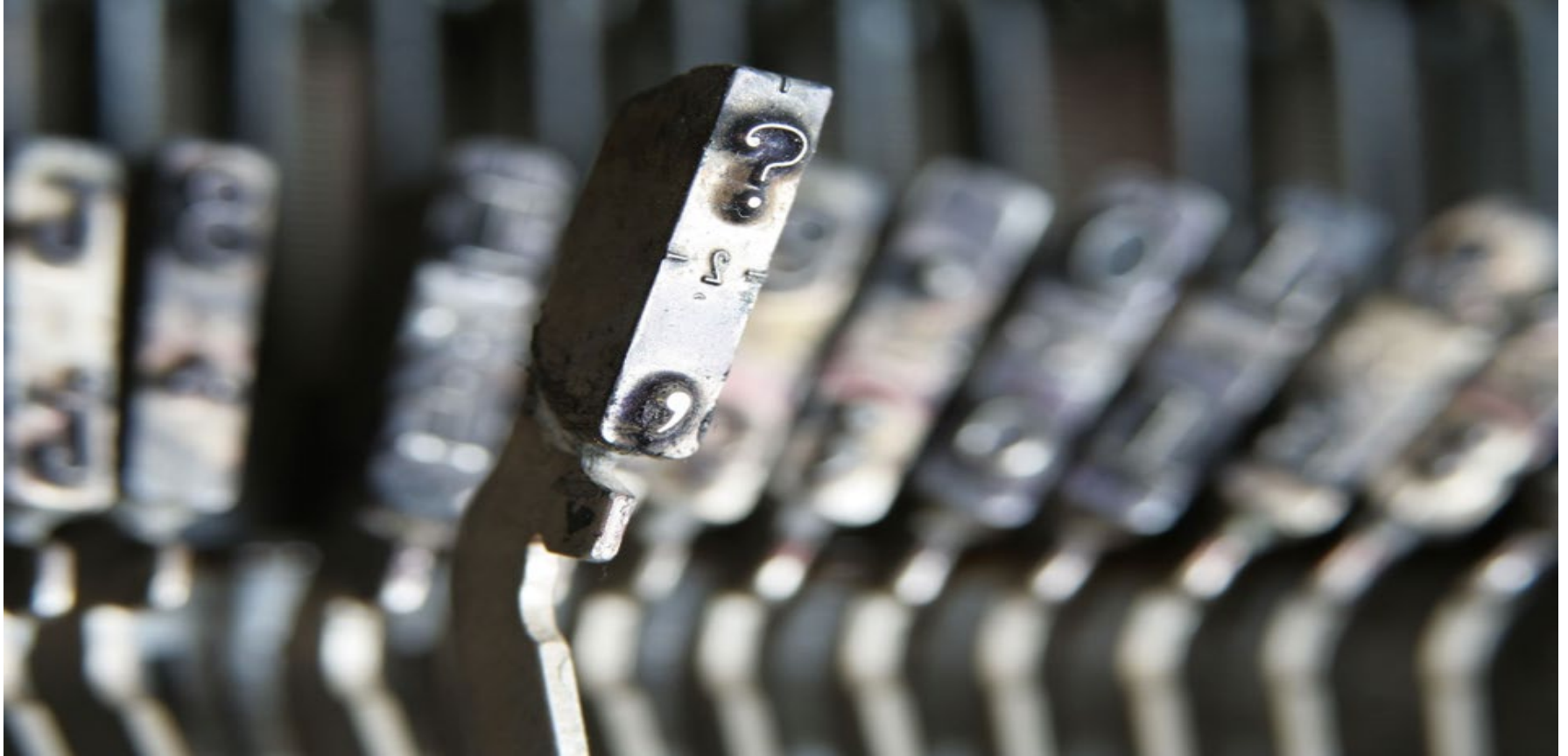
By Michael Hawthorne • February 01, 2023

The State of Journalism

Americans' Trust in Mass Media, 1972 - 2022

In general, how much trust do you have in the mass media (such as newspapers, TV and radio) when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately and fairly: a great deal, a fair amount or none at all?





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