

REGIONAL

PFAS

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

Regional PFAS Community Engagement Sessions

Background

In October 2021, EPA released its PFAS Strategic Roadmap, which highlights concrete actions the Agency will take across a range of environmental media and EPA program offices to protect people and the environment from per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination. In early 2023, EPA held a series of virtual community engagement sessions for each of its 10 Regions, and an additional session for Tribes, to share actions taken under the PFAS Strategic Roadmap and to provide an opportunity for community members to share feedback with EPA.

EPA Region 1 Session Summary

Region 1's community engagement session was held on April 11, 2023, and 149 people attended the session. During the session, EPA Region 1 Administrator and EPA PFAS Council Co-chair David Cash spoke about how PFAS have affected New England communities, some of the first in the nation where the presence of PFAS was discovered.

During the session, EPA heard from community members, environmental activists, nonprofit organizations, community organizers, a state senator, and others about how PFAS have impacted their communities and their lives. Their statements touched on topics including the need for more PFAS regulation, regulating PFAS as a class, following other agencies' actions, river and drinking water contamination, a lack of testing and monitoring, prioritizing prevention, cost concerns, the need for additional grant and funding opportunities, PFAS in pesticides, the effects of PFAS on the atmosphere and air, and a lack of transparency, accountability, and responsibility.

A common theme throughout the session was encouraging stronger PFAS regulations. Several individuals said that PFAS should be regulated as a class rather than chemical-by-chemical, voicing concern about the time it will take to study each PFAS. A member of the Vermont PFAS Military Poisons Coalition recommended the EPA follow the European Chemicals Agency and ban the production and import of over 10,000 PFAS chemicals. A speaker from Merrimack, New Hampshire, mentioned that current MCLs do not account for the conditions in her community. "PFBA, PFPeA, PFHpA, and PFHxA, those four have consistently appeared in our water at higher levels than the four in your hazard index," she said.

EPA also heard concerns about a lack of PFAS testing and monitoring and their effects on water and the air. A Westfield resident explained that the city has approved development on a previous chrome plating site without any PFAS testing. Another individual, a Massachusetts state senator, expressed worry about a local biosolids gasification facility that burns PFAS materials. Finally, individuals from New Hampshire and Massachusetts spoke about the Saint-Gobain facility that contaminated the Merrimack River and drinking water. "You have over 400,000 people, mostly in EJ communities, who are getting their primary drinking water from that river, and there is not sufficient testing, monitoring, or tracking of what's actually happening within the river right now, and that's one area that we'd like to see improved," said one speaker.

Another concern among individuals was a lack of transparency, accountability, and responsibility from EPA. One speaker, a weed removal service owner, said that the Vermont Department of Health and Agency of Agriculture will not share information about PFAS in pesticides which raises concern about the food he consumes. A speaker from Merrimack Citizens for Clean Water said the progress made in New Hampshire has been citizen-driven. She asked EPA to do more regarding cleanup and hazardous substance designation.

A speaker from the Massachusetts Water Works Association shared concern about the cost of PFAS cleanup. She called for more funding and an exemption for utilities that did not cause the contamination, explaining that CERCLA “will place significant costs on local government, particularly water and wastewater systems, who are treating drinking water and wastewater to protect public health and the environment, costs that will be borne by ratepayers.”

Community members also focused on the need for prevention efforts. A member of Westfield Residents Advocating for Themselves emphasized the importance of prevention and protection over the continued use of PFAS and monitoring.

EPA Region 1 is thankful for the feedback provided during this session. Individuals shared valuable stories, questions, recommendations, concerns, and affirmations about the work that is being done. EPA is committed to continuing to use this feedback to inform future work under the PFAS Strategic Roadmap.

Region 1 Community Feedback and Ongoing EPA Actions

Under the PFAS Strategic Roadmap, EPA is making progress to address priority areas highlighted in the feedback shared by Region 1 participants, including:

Addressing PFAS As a Class: EPA has continued its work to deepen our understanding of PFAS categories through the National PFAS Testing Strategy, which EPA released alongside the PFAS Roadmap in October 2021. The Testing Strategy is a major step toward breaking PFAS into distinct categories to direct research, amplify regulatory action, and accelerate technology and policy solutions to restrict and remediate PFAS. In the past year, EPA released its second and third test orders under the Testing Strategy to require manufacturers to test chemicals used to make plastics and to make GenX chemicals, respectively, and anticipates more orders in the year ahead. As EPA continues to implement the Testing Strategy and as EPA learns more, the Agency also expects to evolve and refine its approach, and to enhance stakeholder engagement.

PFAS Testing and Monitoring Methods: Critical to EPA’s efforts to restrict discharges to waterways are the methods needed to detect PFAS and scientific information on the levels at which PFAS are harmful. EPA and the Department of the Defense are in the final stages of validating EPA Method 1633, a method to test for 40 PFAS in wastewater, surface water, groundwater, soil, biosolids, sediment, landfill leachate, and fish tissue.

Preventing New PFAS Contamination: EPA is pursuing a comprehensive approach to proactively prevent PFAS from entering air, land, and water at levels that can adversely impact human health and the environment. EPA continues to take action to address PFAS chemical safety and is moving quickly and strategically to address upstream industrial discharges of PFAS under the Clean Water Act. In January 2023, EPA released its latest plan for setting technology-based standards for industries that discharge PFAS, known as Effluent Limitations Guidelines (ELG). The plan, known as ELG Plan 15, reinforces EPA’s existing rulemaking efforts for PFAS manufacturers and for metal finishers, and announces EPA’s plans to proceed with a new rulemaking for PFAS discharges from landfills.

To learn more about EPA’s efforts to address PFAS and to watch a full recording of the community engagement session, click [here](#).