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 10 Session Summary

Region 10's community engagement session was held on March 15, 2023, and 233 people attended the session. During the session, Regional Administrator Casey Sixkiller spoke about EPA's goals and strategies for taking action under the PFAS Strategic Roadmap, including collaborating with partners across EPA, federal agencies, tribal nations, states, and with the public and to better understand how PFAS contamination has impacted communities.

During the session, EPA heard from community members, water utilities, regulators, engineers, and others about how PFAS have impacted their communities and their lives. Their statements touched on topics including increasing education and communication to the public, the need for grant and funding opportunities, contamination surrounding military installations, impacts to private wells, accelerating the pace of federal actions, costs that may be imposed on water utilities and communities, equity concerns, holding polluters accountable, source reduction, PFAS in biosolids, using existing EPA authorities to take federal action, PFAS in air emissions, bioaccumulation in animals, identifying techniques for disposal, effluent limitations guidelines, working with other government agencies to take action, personal health effects, increasing water utility testing, and more.

One theme mentioned frequently was improving EPA's education and communication to the public. Community members were seeking more information and clarity about potential health impacts of PFAS, testing results from their local water utility, bioaccumulation in livestock, and common consumer goods containing PFAS. One community member from Vancouver, Washington, spoke about his confusion understanding health impacts, options for filtering PFAS, and how to mitigate exposure to PFAS.

Multiple individuals noted they live in rural areas and explained their difficulty in finding funding for testing and filtering water in private wells. Some individuals mentioned that although they or someone they know have tested for PFAS in their wells, more funding is needed to cover the cost of filtration systems. EPA heard concerns about ensuring funding is available and accessible for all. "We're private well owners and there's just no support for us," said a speaker from Yakima, Washington. "We have people that are only living on bottled water and don't have safe access to showers or agriculture or to water their livestock."

Individuals representing water utilities also emphasized the high costs associated with filtration systems. A speaker from the Sammamish Plateau Water and Sewer District in Washington noted that water utilities and consumers are not polluters of PFAS, and additional funding is needed to help cover costs.

Individuals who live near former and active military installations also gave feedback about how PFAS have affected them. EPA heard from individuals living near the Yakima Training Center, Fairchild Air Force Base, Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, and Hanford Site. All these individuals mentioned the high levels of PFAS that have been detected in their water sources, mostly private wells. These individuals also noted the need for additional funding and filtration systems in their communities, and EPA heard requests to increase PFAS cleanup around military installations.

Multiple individuals called for EPA to accelerate the pace of federal actions and to hold polluters accountable with these actions, not water utilities or consumers. EPA also heard feedback about the need for source reduction of PFAS and regulation of PFAS in biosolids. "In addition to the focus on scientific research, OACWA advocates that EPA elevates source reduction as a top priority ahead of instream water quality standards and end-of-pipe pollution discharge limits," said a representative of the Oregon Association of Clean Water Agencies (OACWA).

EPA Region 10 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 10 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 10 participants, including:

Transparency and Communications: This fall, EPA is releasing its second one-year PFAS Roadmap progress report – fulfilling a commitment in EPA's October 2021 PFAS Strategic Roadmap to report to the public on the status of the actions outlined in the Roadmap, as well as future actions the Agency may take. EPA will also continue to engage with states, tribes, federal partners, stakeholders, and the public on PFAS as the Agency continues its efforts under the PFAS Strategic Roadmap. Communicating about PFAS risk to communities has been a particular priority of EPA's Local Government Advisory Committee, which held a PFAS tabletop exercise in May 2023 and made recommendations to EPA in September 2023 on developing a toolkit for local governments.

Addressing PFAS Contamination at Military Installations: EPA has been coordinating closely with the Department of Defense through the Interagency Policy Committee on PFAS to bring enhanced focus toward PFAS issues around military installations and their communities to accelerate solutions and increase transparency. Additionally, near military installations with known, significant PFAS contamination, EPA is sampling private drinking water wells to assess whether alternative drinking water is needed. EPA continues to ensure Federal Facilities Agreements requirements are met for federal facilities on the CERCLA National Priorities List.

Funding and Financing: President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law includes $10 billion in funding to address PFAS and other emerging contaminants in water. As EPA highlighted in its November 2022 one-year PFAS Roadmap progress report, these efforts are making transformational investments in cleaning up PFAS and other emerging contaminants in water, especially in small or disadvantaged communities. In February 2023, EPA announced the availability of $2 billion in grant funding to address emerging contaminants in drinking water in small or disadvantaged communities. These funds are being allocated to states and territories and will promote access to safe and clean water in small, rural, and disadvantaged communities while supporting local economies.

To learn more about EPA's efforts to address PFAS and to watch a full recording of the community engagement session, click **here.**