

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 4 Session Summary

Region 4's community engagement session was held on March 21, 2023, and 215 people attended the session. During the session, Regional Administrator Daniel Blackman spoke about Region 4's actions to address PFAS, including proactive testing and monitoring and new funding made available through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

During the session, EPA heard from community members, local organizers, local government officials, nonprofit organizations, riverkeepers, and others about how PFAS have impacted their communities and their lives. Their statements touched on topics including equity concerns, the need for additional grant and funding opportunities, regulation of industry, accelerating the pace of federal actions, holding polluters accountable, personal health effects, PFAS in biosolids, costs that may be imposed on water utilities and communities, food advisories, using existing authorities to take action, private wells, increased communication and education to the public, soil contamination, regulating PFAS as a class, increasing testing, source reduction, difficulties faced by overburdened communities, bioaccumulation in animals, and concerns around enforcement.

Many individuals gave EPA feedback on their equity concerns related to PFAS. EPA heard requests for additional grants and funding, particularly in overburdened and rural communities, to prevent costs associated with cleanup and monitoring from being borne by ratepayers. Two individuals from Osceola County, Florida, spoke about the Narcoossee Dump site, located in their community, where PFAS have been detected in the soil and groundwater. These community members voiced concerns about getting access to funding and expressed worry for elderly neighbors who may have been exposed to PFAS over a long period of time.

EPA also heard feedback from individuals requesting more federal action. Individuals noted that without regulations and enforcement on a federal level, many states won't take action. An executive director of a nonprofit river protection organization spoke about the need for federal regulations for industry using existing EPA authorities. "Without national enforcement, a race to the bottom will occur. This will threaten communities already overburdened by pollution," she said. Some individuals specified that federal action should hold polluters accountable for costs associated with PFAS pollution.

Community members also shared personal health effects they have experienced and requested EPA provide additional advisories around consumption of fish, livestock, and game meat that may contain PFAS. Multiple individuals were concerned about PFAS contamination in soils, and how the presence of PFAS in biosolids affects farmlands and gardens.

Individuals gave feedback about the need for increased education and communication from EPA on PFAS-related topics. Community members had questions about how to filter PFAS in private wells, what food is safe to consume, and how to access funding.

EPA Region 4 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 4 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 4 participants, including:

Ensuring Equity and Environmental Justice: A critical, ongoing focus for EPA's efforts is ensuring the protection of disadvantaged communities to ensure that all communities have equitable access to solutions. In the past year, EPA received PFAS recommendations from EPA's National Environmental Justice Advisory Council, which encouraged EPA in December 2022 to institutionalize EPA's commitment to PFAS and to pursue its efforts not only within the three focus areas of the PFAS Roadmap (research, restrict, and remediate) but to also focus on both responding to PFAS and to the resources required to do so.

Funding for PFAS Solutions: 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.

Industry Regulation and Enforcement: 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. And as EPA continues its work to advance federal leadership on PFAS through final regulatory standards, EPA remains proactive in using its enforcement tools to better identify and address PFAS releases at facilities. To ensure continuing focus of PFAS enforcement efforts in the coming years and across administrations, EPA announced that "addressing exposure to PFAS" would be one of EPA's six National Enforcement and Compliance Initiatives for Fiscal Years 2024–2027. The key goals of the PFAS initiative are to achieve site characterization, control ongoing releases that pose a threat to human health and the environment, ensure compliance with permits and other agreements to prevent and address PFAS contamination, and address endangerment issues as they arise.

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