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 8 Session Summary

Region 8's community engagement session was held on March 8, 2023, and 182 people attended the session. During the session, Regional Administrator KC Becker spoke about how PFAS have affected the Region and highlighted research efforts underway, including wastewater sampling at selected sites on Tribal reservations and PFAS removal research at the University of North Dakota.

During the session, EPA heard from community members, city officials, state agencies, attorneys, doctors, local organizers, and others about how PFAS have impacted their communities and their lives. Their statements touched on topics including the need for grants and funding for public water utilities and private wells, bioaccumulation in animals, PFAS in biosolids, equity concerns, identifying techniques for disposal, accelerating the pace and transparency of federal actions, costs that may be imposed on water utilities and communities, effluent limitations guidelines, holding polluters accountable, regulating PFAS as a class, using existing EPA authorities to take federal action, working with other government agencies to take action, reducing PFAS at the source, and contamination surrounding military installations.

A common theme throughout the feedback was the high cost of PFAS cleanup and monitoring. Specific comments made by participants touched on the costs PFAS cleanup imposes on water systems, farmers, ranchers, and consumers, and the importance of holding polluters accountable for these costs. Several people mentioned the need for funding to address these costs and to test for PFAS in public water utilities and private wells. Many individuals emphasized the need for funding opportunities to be equitable, with a focus on disadvantaged communities. A community organizer in Colorado spoke about how PFAS contamination has affected her small town, stating, "We cannot afford a million dollar anything for filtering chemicals that we did not put here… It's incredibly important to provide resources for smaller communities to fill out grants."

Another concern among individuals was the difficulty of the PFAS cleanup process, and the need to work toward identifying disposal techniques. Two representatives from the Lowry Landfill Superfund Site Advisory Group shared the challenges they had testing for PFAS and exploring cleanup technologies at the Superfund Site. Another speaker, an environmental scientist, pointed out that cleaning up PFAS is difficult due to the lack of approved disposal techniques.

Many individuals were also focused on how to address PFAS in food due to its presence in biosolids and bioaccumulation in animals. "We see evidence that PFAS is growing in farm soils, food that we're

producing. It's widespread in rivers, fish, and wild game meat that could pose a health problem for people and the planet," said one individual, a Colorado resident. "And there's painfully little conversation about the safety of eating wild-caught fish for tribal communities or other people who are fishing in our region." Another speaker, from the Colorado Farm Bureau, highlighted the difficulty of PFAS in biosolids for farmers and ranchers.

EPA also heard feedback on specific regulatory actions EPA should take, including regulating industry, taking federal action under existing authorities, and regulating PFAS as a class. Some individuals requested EPA set strong effluent limitations guidelines to reduce industry PFAS discharges, while others were focused on reducing the use of PFAS. Additionally, multiple individuals said EPA should use existing authorities to take federal action, including the Clean Water Act National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits. A few individuals called for EPA to regulate PFAS as a class, as opposed to chemical-by-chemical. Lastly, EPA heard community members' request for EPA to accelerate the pace of their actions and increase transparency around these actions.

EPA Region 8 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 8 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 8 participants, including:

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.

PFAS in Biosolids: EPA continues its work to address PFAS in biosolids by developing a risk assessment for PFOA and PFOS. EPA is currently working to complete these final risk assessments for release in 2024, building on Science Advisory Board advice in October 2023 on EPA's framework for biosolids risk assessment. EPA is also working to further engage with stakeholders to develop principles and to discuss perspectives on the challenges and opportunities in dealing with the issue of PFAS in municipal biosolids. The rise in concern over PFAS in municipal biosolids has created challenges and uncertainties for publicly owned treatment works, solid waste management professionals, and regulators that rely on the three main biosolids management options: land application, disposal in landfills, and incineration.

Addressing PFAS Destruction and Disposal: EPA is poised to soon update its 2020 interim guidance on destroying or disposing of PFAS-containing materials. In September, EPA sent the updated interim guidance to OMB for interagency review, after which EPA plans to release the updated interim guidance this winter. Critically, this updated guidance reflects significant scientific work across EPA and the scientific community to fill gaps in our understanding of PFAS destruction and disposal technologies and to highlight remaining uncertainties requiring further research.

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