

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 Tribal Communities Session Summary

EPA's Tribal communities engagement session was held on April 6, 2023, and 104 people attended the session. During the session, Assistant Administrator for EPA's Office of International and Tribal Affairs Jane Nishida spoke about EPA's commitment to ensuring that the Agency's PFAS efforts focus on unique Tribal needs, including researching PFAS uptake by culturally sensitive plants and PFAS accumulation in subsistence foods.

During the session, EPA heard from Tribal members from the Big Cypress Seminole reservation, the Red Lake Band of Ojibwe, the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, the Pueblo of Sandia, the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakima Nation as well as staff, local organizers, construction industry organizations, and water quality managers about how PFAS have impacted their communities and their lives. Their statements touched on topics including the need for additional grants and funding, consideration on how EPA's CERCLA enforcement discretion authority could be applied to Tribal communities, research for PFAS uptake in plants and subsistence foods, identifying treatment and disposal technologies, education and communication around available resources, PFAS in firefighting gear, equity concerns, PFAS in biosolids and landfills, and enforcement actions.

EPA heard from multiple individuals who identified the need for additional funding and grants to address various effects of PFAS. Individuals noted that more funding is needed to conduct research and testing, address PFAS found in water systems, and to replace contaminated firefighting gear.

Individuals also noted the need for increased research on PFAS uptake by culturally sensitive plants including wild rice and plants used for medicinal purposes, as well as studies on PFAS in fish and wild game like deer, antelope, and elk that are subsistence foods for Tribes. "We really need to have that information so we can make judgment calls for our Tribes," said one speaker, the co-leader of the Tribal PFAS working group. One staff person from the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa noted that although additional projects on sediment, fish, and rice have been prepared in collaboration with academia, there was no funding to conduct the research. Individuals noted other research gaps such as identifying potential PFAS sources for rural areas and supporting water treatment technologies.

Individuals also shared unique challenges faced by Tribal governments including needing similar resources and technical support provided to states, assisting impacted Tribal members living off reservations and

outside state service areas, and dealing with regulatory loopholes that allow widespread biosolids land application within reservation boundaries.

EPA 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.

Tribal 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 Tribal 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.

Addressing PFAS Plant Uptake: EPA partnered with USDA to request grant applications in October 2023 for \$8 million in funding for research to better understand PFAS uptake in plants and animals, and management of PFAS impacts in agricultural, rural, and Tribal communities.

Impacts to Subsistence Farming: EPA researchers are working with communities to address PFAS science questions important to their lives and livelihoods. This includes several projects with Tribal partners that are focused on identifying and characterizing the extent of PFAS contamination in water, sediment, fish, and plants near Tribal communities.

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