

Interim Recommendations for Addressing Groundwater Contaminated with PFOA and PFOS

Fact Sheet

Overview

On December 19, 2019, EPA issued Interim Recommendations for Addressing Groundwater Contaminated with Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOA) and Perfluorooctanesulfonate (PFOS) that can be used at sites under federal cleanup programs. Federal agencies and states have asked EPA to provide guidance on this issue, and EPA is following through on its commitment. It is important to note that these are “interim recommendations,” and the agency will continue to evaluate new scientific information on PFAS. Addressing PFAS is an active and ongoing effort for the agency, and issuing these interim recommendations is a priority action under EPA’s PFAS Action Plan.

EPA’s interim recommendations will help protect public health in communities across the country by providing clear and consistent guidance for cleanup sites being evaluated and addressed under federal cleanup programs, including CERCLA or Superfund and corrective action under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA). This information is based on EPA’s current scientific understanding of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) toxicity. EPA acknowledges that scientific information on these compounds continues to evolve. As part of the PFAS Action Plan, EPA is developing and assessing toxicity information, test methods, laboratory methods, analytical methods, exposure models, and treatment methods, among other research efforts to improve our knowledge about this class of chemicals. EPA anticipates considering additional recommendations for addressing other PFAS at a future date as we advance our knowledge of these other substances.

EPA’s Action

EPA is prioritizing public health impacts by focusing on addressing groundwater that is a current or potential source of drinking water. The guidance recommends:

- Using a screening level of 40 parts per trillion (ppt) to determine if PFOA and/or PFOS is present at a site and may warrant further attention.
 - Screening levels are risk-based values that are used to determine if levels of contamination may warrant further investigation at a site.
 - Using EPA’s PFOA and PFOS Lifetime Drinking Water Health Advisory level of 70 ppt as the preliminary remediation goal (PRG) for contaminated groundwater that is a current or potential source of drinking water, where no state or tribal MCL or other applicable or relevant and appropriate requirements (ARARs) are available or sufficiently protective.
 - PRGs are generally initial targets for cleanup, which may be adjusted on a site-specific basis as more information becomes available.
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Public Input

During the 45-day public comment period, the agency received nearly 300 public comments that included a wide range of perspectives on the draft interim recommendations. A number of commenters suggested using values that were higher than the recommended screening level and PRG and others suggested using values that were lower. Since 2016, EPA has determined that drinking water concentrations of PFOA and PFOS of 70 ppt or lower offer a margin of protection for all individuals throughout their lives from adverse health effects resulting from exposure to PFOA and PFOS in drinking water. EPA also believes 70 ppt is appropriate for use as a Preliminary Remediation Goal (PRG) for CERCLA purposes as a first step in the process of developing cleanup levels at a Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) site.

Commenters suggested EPA should consider including additional PFAS in the recommendations. Under the PFAS Action Plan, the agency is evaluating other available toxicity information, including efforts to understand how to address a larger number of PFAS. The agency anticipates considering additional recommendations for addressing other PFAS at a future date when the results of research outlined the PFAS Action Plan are available.

How will EPA apply these recommendations?

These recommendations are for sites being evaluated and addressed under federal cleanup programs, including CERCLA or Superfund and corrective action under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA). The recommendations in this guidance may also be useful for state, tribal, or other regulatory authorities (e.g., federal facility cleanup programs, approved state RCRA corrective action programs); though, many states have promulgated state standards that may be considered ARARs under CERCLA. This guidance document does not impose any requirements and shall not by itself be considered binding on any party. Rather, the sources of authority and requirements for addressing groundwater contamination regarding a particular situation are the relevant statutes, and as appropriate, regulations.

The interim recommendations and additional information can be found at:

<https://www.epa.gov/pfas/interim-recommendations-addressing-groundwater-contaminated-pfoa-and-pfos>

Background on the PFAS Action Plan

PFAS are a large group of man-made chemicals used in consumer products and industrial processes. In use since the 1940s, PFAS are resistant to heat, oils, stains, grease, and water—properties which contribute to their persistence in the environment.

The agency's PFAS Action Plan is the first multi-media, multi-program, national research, management, and risk communication plan to address a challenge like PFAS. The plan responds to the extensive public input the agency received during the PFAS National Leadership Summit, multiple community engagements, and through the public docket. The PFAS Action Plan outlines the tools EPA is developing to assist states, tribes, and communities in addressing PFAS.

EPA is taking the following highlighted actions:

Highlighted Action: Drinking Water

- EPA is committed to following the national primary drinking water regulation rulemaking process as established by the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA).
- EPA has sent the [proposed regulatory determination](#) for PFOA and PFOS to the Office of Management and Budget for interagency review.
- The agency is also gathering and evaluating information to determine if regulation is appropriate for other chemicals in the PFAS family.

Highlighted Action: Cleanup

- On December 19, 2019, EPA issued *Interim Recommendations for Address Groundwater Contaminated with PFOA and PFOS*, which provides cleanup guidance for federal cleanup programs (e.g., CERCLA and RCRA) that will be helpful to states and tribes.
- EPA will follow through on the regulatory development process for listing perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS) as hazardous substances under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA).

Highlighted Action: Monitoring

- EPA will propose nationwide drinking water monitoring for PFAS under the next UCMR monitoring cycle.

Highlighted Action: Toxicity

- EPA has issued an advanced notice of proposed rulemaking that would allow the public to provide input on adding PFAS to the Toxic Release Inventory toxic chemical list.
- A supplemental proposal to ensure that certain persistent long-chain PFAS chemicals cannot be manufactured in or imported into the United States without notification and review under TSCA is currently undergoing interagency review at the Office of Management and Budget.

Highlighted Action: Surface Water Protection

- EPA is exploring data availability and research to support the development of Clean Water Act human health and aquatic life criteria for certain PFAS, as data allows.
- EPA is examining available information about PFAS released into surface waters by industrial sources to determine if additional study is needed for potential regulation.

Highlighted Action: Biosolids

- EPA is in the early scoping stages of risk assessments for PFOA and PFOS in biosolids to understand any potential health impacts.

Highlighted Action: Research

- On November 22, 2019, EPA announced availability of \$4.8 million in [funding for new research on managing PFAS in agriculture](#).
- EPA continues to compile and assess human and ecological toxicity information on PFAS to support risk management decisions.
- EPA continues to develop new methods to test for additional PFAS in drinking water. The agency is also validating analytical methods for surface water, ground water, wastewater, soils, sediments and

biosolids; developing new methods to test for PFAS in air and emissions; and improving laboratory methods to discover unknown PFAS.

- EPA is developing exposure models to understand how PFAS moves through the environment to impact people and ecosystems.
- EPA continues to assess and review treatment methods for removing PFAS in drinking water.
- EPA is working to develop tools to assist officials with the cleanup of contaminated sites.

Highlighted Action: Enforcement

- EPA uses enforcement tools, when appropriate, to address PFAS exposure in the environment and assists states in enforcement activities.
- EPA has already taken actions to address PFAS, including issuing Safe Drinking Water Act orders and providing support to states. [See examples in the PFAS Action Plan.](#)

Highlighted Action: Risk Communications

- EPA will work collaboratively to develop a risk communication toolbox that includes multi-media materials and messaging for federal, state, tribal, and local partners to use with the public.

A full summary of EPA's action to address PFAS can be found in the PFAS Action Plan:

<https://www.epa.gov/pfas/epas-pfas-action-plan>