

Focus on: PFAS Chemical Action Plan



The U.S. Air Force distributes bottled water to Airway Heights residents after the water system is contaminated by PFAS. (USAF photo)

The Chemical Action Plan Process Washington State's departments of Ecology and Health work together to develop chemical action plans. The goal of a chemical action plan is to comprehensively assess the environmental and health effects of a chemical or class of chemicals, and to recommend strategies to reduce or eliminate these impacts.

Ecology and Health work with industry, tribes, local governments, and environmental groups in developing the plans.

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For PFAS chemical action plan documents and updates, go to bit.ly/prioritytoxics-pfas

Special accommodations

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Protecting Washington from PFAS chemicals

The Washington State departments of Ecology and Health are developing a chemical action plan that will identify the potential health and environmental effects of PFAS chemicals, and recommend strategies to reduce or eliminate those impacts.

PFAS is an acronym for "per- and poly-fluorinated alkyl substances." PFAS are synthetic chemicals used in many consumer products, including food wrappers, fabrics, and carpets, to make them resistant to water, oil, grease, stains, and heat. Some forms of PFAS have been linked to health problems in people and are toxic in animals.

Why we are concerned about PFAS

Everyone is exposed to PFAS, and some forms have known toxic effects.

In recent years, PFAS contamination above EPA's health advisory level has been found in drinking water wells in Airway Heights, North Whidbey Island, Issaquah, and at Joint Base Lewis-McChord.

PFAS are water soluble and highly mobile, meaning they can easily contaminate groundwater and can be hard to filter out. Many PFAS transform into highly persistent perfluorinated chemicals in the environment. There are no natural processes that can break these substances down. Exposures could continue for hundreds or thousands of years.

Ecology and Health released an Interim PFAS Chemical Action Plan in April 2018 that recommends ways to reduce people's exposure and environmental releases. The plan includes protective actions from two new laws related to the use of PFAS-containing firefighting foam and an analysis of food packaging.

Types of PFAS

The most commonly studied and reported PFAS are:

1. **PFOA** – perfluorooctanoic acid
2. **PFOS** – perfluorooctane sulfonic acid.

New Laws Target PFAS

The 2018 Washington Legislature passed two laws dealing with PFAS chemicals:

Engrossed Substitute House Bill 2658

Beginning Jan. 1, 2022, this bill will prohibit the sale of food packaging containing PFAS chemicals. Before the ban takes effect, Ecology must first conduct an alternatives assessment to determine whether there are safer alternatives to PFAS used in food packaging.

Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 6413

Beginning July 1, 2018, use of PFAS containing firefighting foam for training purposes is not allowed. Beginning July 1, 2020, the sale of firefighting foam containing PFAS chemicals is prohibited. Exempt from the ban are the military, airports, oil refineries, and chemical plants.

Beginning July 1, 2018, the bill also requires manufacturers to notify purchasers if protective equipment for firefighters contains PFAS.

Interim recommendations

Ensure drinking water is safe

- Support State Board of Health rulemaking to set a state drinking water standard or advisory level for PFAS. Currently, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has an advisory level of 70 parts per trillion for PFOS and PFOA, two forms of PFAS that have documented health risks.
- Expand drinking water testing. Prioritize areas at high risk of contamination, such as those near airports and fire training centers.
- Provide technical assistance to help water systems reduce exposure to PFAS.

Manage environmental PFAS contamination

- Develop cleanup levels for PFAS. Currently, there is no regulatory standard to determine whether a site contaminated by PFAS requires cleanup, nor are there best practices for conducting such a cleanup.
- Investigate effective methods to clean up contaminated soils, surface water, and groundwater.

Reduce risks to drinking water from firefighting foam

The known cases of PFAS contamination in drinking water in Washington State are linked to the use of firefighting foam. This foam is widely used to fight oil and fuel fires, both in training drills and during emergencies at airports, industrial facilities, and similar sites.

- Implement the new law that restricts the use and sale of PFAS-containing foams.
- Survey foam users to identify high-risk sites.
- Develop outreach on responsible foam use.
- Replace foams with PFAS-free alternatives.

Investigate other sources of PFAS

- Identify other PFAS uses that are most likely to pose a risk to human health and the environment, such as industrial releases, carpets, and cosmetics.
- Ensure manufacturers follow requirements for firefighting protective equipment under the new law.
- Conduct alternatives assessments on food packaging and other major uses of PFAS, including firefighting foam, and textiles. Under the new law, Ecology is required to evaluate PFAS alternatives in food packaging.

Next steps

Ecology and Health will continue to evaluate uses and impacts of PFAS chemicals, and release additional recommendations in 2019.