



# Emerging contaminants demand sustained state policy response

## PFAS contamination in Michigan has led to extensive testing, remediation

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**M**ichigan has been a national leader in managing and mitigating PFAS contamination in drinking water.

Our interagency response team is fielding questions from communities across the nation and around the globe about how to best handle PFAS contamination. I am proud of our state's commitment to environmental protection. But we can't stop here. The safety and protection of our state's drinking water is and continues to be a top priority.

PFAS stands for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances — a family of human-made chemicals used widely in the industrial, food and textile industries, as well as in some firefighting foams, food packaging, cleaning products and other household items.

Some types of PFAS compounds, such as perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), have been phased out of the manufacturing process, but they still persist in the environment. That is because PFAS chemicals are incredibly stable and break down slowly in the environment. They also are highly soluble, easily transferring through soil to groundwater.

In different parts of our state, PFAS-contaminated sites have been confirmed, and these toxic chemicals have been detected in both private drinking wells and municipal water systems.

### Up to \$125 million authorized, so far

As we enter the next phase of our PFAS response, we will look to scientific experts to guide any necessary policy or regulatory actions. We are deepening our understanding of how these chemicals move through the environment, as well as their impact on water supplies and ecosystems.

We are also planning to conduct a human health assessment in northern Kent County. A health assessment is not a health study, but this assessment will tell our response team about the population exposed to PFAS and the magnitude of the exposure. This assessment may lead to a future health study, if we identify an elevated exposure due to an environmental source.

Over the last 14 months, the Michigan Legislature has authorized up to \$125 million for PFAS cleanup and response, and we will continue to monitor the need for additional funds while assembling our next budget.

Over these same 14 months, our Michigan PFAS Action Response Team has made tremendous prog-

### Health concerns spread over PFAS-contaminated sites, water supplies

**Michigan** has the Midwest's highest number of sites known to be contaminated with the family of human-made chemicals known as PFAS, or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances. But this pollution problem, and the risk it poses to public health, is shared by other states as well.

The sources of PFAS contamination include the use of these chemicals in firefighting foams at military bases and in the manufacture of various commercial and household products. For example, 3M's disposal of these chemicals led to groundwater contamination in the Twin Cities area. In 2018, the **Minnesota** attorney general finalized an \$850 million settlement with the company.

Between 2013 and 2015, under a program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, all of the nation's large public water systems tested their treated tap water for certain PFAS chemicals. A subsequent study led by Harvard University researchers found contaminations in 194 water systems, with detections concentrated in 13 states, including Illinois, Minnesota and **Ohio** in the Midwest.

"The extent of tap water contamination is likely much greater," the Environmental Working Group has said, noting that the EPA program

### Sites of toxic fluorinated chemicals in tap water and at industrial or military sites in Midwest



● Known contamination site

Source: Environmental Working Group and Northeastern University Social Science Environmental Health Research Institute

did not test private wells or many small water systems. The EPA refers to PFAS chemicals as "contaminants of emerging concern," with the risks to human health not completely known. Health concerns include low birthweights, cancer, increased cholesterol levels and adverse effects on the immune system.

ress in PFAS containment and response. Created via a 2017 executive order, this team includes participation from seven state agencies. Its task: Investigate sources and locations of PFAS, and protect drinking water and public health. Its accomplishments include:

- testing 100 percent of all Michigan's public drinking water sources.
- testing drinking water at all schools and day care facilities with their own well-water sources.
- identifying 34 contamination sites and then following up with remediation activities.
- coordinating the response to affected communities, including supplying local residents with supplies of bottled water.
- testing fish and game in affected areas.
- collaborating with federal partners and pursuing the cleanup of U.S. Department of Defense sites (a

common source of contamination).

These accomplishments represent significant progress, but much work still needs to be done. Many unanswered questions about this class of chemicals remain. As chair of the House subcommittee that oversees appropriations for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, I will ensure that efforts to protect human health are a top priority.

We must continue to seek sound, science-based answers to key questions related to public health, environmental response and regulation to protect the health and safety of all Michigan families.

Rep. Mary Whiteford was first elected to the Michigan House in 2016. She is a 2016 graduate of CSG Midwest's Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development (BILLD).

### Examples of three Midwest states' PFAS-related standards or regulations\*

State	Standard or advisory value for perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA)
Michigan	Drinking water standard of 70 parts per trillion for combined concentrations of PFOA and PFOS
Iowa	Groundwater protection standard of 70 parts per trillion for combined PFOA and PFOS concentrations
Minnesota	Health-based advisory values of 35 parts per trillion for PFOA and 27 parts per trillion for PFOS in water

\* The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency sets a health advisory level (non-regulatory and non-enforceable) of 70 parts per trillion for lifetime exposure to PFOA and PFOS. In 2018, New Jersey became the first U.S. state to establish an enforceable limit on a PFAS chemical in drinking water. It set the maximum contaminant level for perfluorononanoic acid (PFNA) at 13 parts per trillion.

Sources: International Technology & Regulatory Council and Water Quality Association

### Submissions welcome

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