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Biden–Harris Administration Finalizes First–Ever National Drinking Water Standard to Protect 100M People from PFAS Pollution

As part of the Administration’s commitment to combating PFAS pollution, EPA announces \$1B investment through President Biden’s Investing in America agenda to address PFAS in drinking water

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Contact Information

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WASHINGTON - Today, April 10, the Biden-Harris Administration issued the first-ever national, legally enforceable drinking water standard to protect communities from exposure to harmful per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), also known as ‘forever chemicals.’ Exposure to PFAS has been linked to deadly cancers, impacts to the liver and heart, and immune and developmental damage to infants and children. This final rule represents the most significant step to protect public health under EPA’s PFAS Strategic Roadmap <https://epa.gov/pfas/pfas-strategic-roadmap-epas-commitments-action-2021-2024>. The final rule will reduce PFAS exposure for approximately 100 million people, prevent thousands of deaths, and reduce tens of thousands of serious illnesses. Today’s announcement complements President Biden’s government-wide action plan <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/10/18/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-launches-plan-to-combat-pfas-pollution/#:~:text=consistent%20with%20president%20biden's%20commitment,from%20discharging%20pfas%20into%20america's> to combat PFAS pollution.

Through President Biden’s Investing in America agenda, EPA is also making unprecedented funding available to help ensure that all people have clean and safe water. In addition to today’s final rule, EPA is announcing nearly \$1 billion in newly available funding <https://epa.gov/dwcapacity/emerging-contaminants-ec-small->

or-disadvantaged-communities-grant-sdc> through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to help states and territories implement PFAS testing and treatment at public water systems and to help owners of private wells address PFAS contamination. This is part of a \$9 billion investment through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to help communities with drinking water impacted by PFAS and other emerging contaminants – the largest-ever investment in tackling PFAS pollution. An additional \$12 billion is available through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for general drinking water improvements, including addressing emerging contaminants like PFAS.

EPA Administrator Michael Regan will join White House Council on Environmental Quality Chair Brenda Mallory to announce the final standard today at an event in Fayetteville, North Carolina. In 2017, area residents learned that the Cape Fear River, the drinking water source for 1 million people in the region, had been heavily contaminated with PFAS pollution from a nearby manufacturing facility. Today's announcements will help protect communities like Fayetteville from further devastating impacts of PFAS.

“Drinking water contaminated with PFAS has plagued communities across this country for too long,” **said EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan**. “That is why President Biden has made tackling PFAS a top priority, investing historic resources to address these harmful chemicals and protect communities nationwide. Our PFAS Strategic Roadmap marshals the full breadth of EPA’s authority and resources to protect people from these harmful forever chemicals. Today, I am proud to finalize this critical piece of our Roadmap, and in doing so, save thousands of lives and help ensure our children grow up healthier.”

“President Biden believes that everyone deserves access to clean, safe drinking water, and he is delivering on that promise,” **said Brenda Mallory, Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality**. “The first national drinking water standards for PFAS marks a significant step towards delivering on the Biden-Harris Administration’s commitment to advancing environmental justice, protecting communities, and securing clean water for people across the country.”

“Under President Biden’s leadership, we are taking a whole-of-government approach to tackle PFAS pollution and ensure that all Americans have access to clean, safe drinking water. Today’s announcement by EPA complements these efforts and will help keep our communities safe from these toxic ‘forever chemicals,’” **said Deputy Assistant to the President for the Cancer Moonshot, Dr. Danielle Carnival**. “Coupled with the additional \$1 billion investment from President Biden’s Investing in America agenda to help communities address PFAS pollution, the reductions in exposure to toxic substances delivered by EPA’s standards will further the Biden Cancer Moonshot goal of reducing the cancer death rate by at least half by 2047 and preventing more than four million cancer deaths — and stopping cancer before it starts by protecting communities from known risks associated with exposure to PFAS and other contaminants, including kidney and testicular cancers, and more.”

EPA is taking a signature step to protect public health by establishing legally enforceable levels for several PFAS known to occur individually and as mixtures in drinking water. This rule sets limits for five individual PFAS: PFOA, PFOS, PFNA, PFHxS, and HFPO-DA (also known as “GenX Chemicals”). The rule also sets a limit for mixtures of any two or more of four PFAS: PFNA, PFHxS, PFBS, and “GenX chemicals.” By reducing

exposure to PFAS, this final rule will prevent thousands of premature deaths, tens of thousands of serious illnesses, including certain cancers and liver and heart impacts in adults, and immune and developmental impacts to infants and children.

This final rule advances President Biden's commitment to ending cancer as we know it as part of the Biden Cancer Moonshot, to ensuring that all Americans have access to clean, safe, drinking water, and to furthering the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to environmental justice by protecting communities that are most exposed to toxic chemicals.

EPA estimates that between about 6% and 10% of the 66,000 public drinking water systems subject to this rule may have to take action to reduce PFAS to meet these new standards. All public water systems have three years to complete their initial monitoring for these chemicals. They must inform the public of the level of PFAS measured in their drinking water. Where PFAS is found at levels that exceed these standards, systems must implement solutions to reduce PFAS in their drinking water within five years.

The new limits in this rule are achievable using a range of available technologies and approaches including granular activated carbon, reverse osmosis, and ion exchange systems. For example, the Cape Fear Public Utility Authority, serving Wilmington, NC – one of the communities most heavily impacted by PFAS contamination – has effectively deployed a granular activated carbon system to remove PFAS regulated by this rule. Drinking water systems will have flexibility to determine the best solution for their community.

EPA will be working closely with state co-regulators in supporting water systems and local officials to implement this rule. In the coming weeks, EPA will host a series of webinars to provide information to the public, communities, and water utilities about the final PFAS drinking water regulation. To learn more about the webinars, please visit EPA's PFAS drinking water regulation webpage <<https://epa.gov/sdwa/and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances-pfas#webinars>>. EPA has also published a toolkit of communications resources <<https://epa.gov/sdwa/pfas-communications-toolkit>> to help drinking water systems and community leaders educate the public about PFAS, where they come from, their health risks, how to reduce exposure, and about this rule.

“We are thankful that Administrator Regan and the Biden Administration are taking this action to protect drinking water in North Carolina and across the country,” **said North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper**. “We asked for this because we know science-based standards for PFAS and other compounds are desperately needed.”

“For decades, the American people have been exposed to the family of incredibly toxic ‘forever chemicals’ known as PFAS with no protection from their government. Those chemicals now contaminate virtually all Americans from birth. That’s because for generations, PFAS chemicals slid off of every federal environmental law like a fried egg off a Teflon pan — until Joe Biden came along,” **said Environmental Working Group President and Co-Founder Ken Cook**. “We commend EPA Administrator Michael Regan for his tireless leadership to make this decision a reality, and CEQ Chair Brenda Mallory for making sure PFAS is tackled with the ‘whole of government’ approach President Biden promised. There is much work yet to be done to end PFAS pollution. The fact that the EPA has adopted the very strong policy announced

today should give everyone confidence that the Biden administration will stay the course and keep the president's promises, until the American people are protected, at long last, from the scourge of PFAS pollution."

"We learned about GenX and other PFAS in our tap water six years ago. I raised my children on this water and watched loved ones suffer from rare or recurrent cancers. No one should ever worry if their tap water will make them sick or give them cancer. I'm grateful the Biden EPA heard our pleas and kept its promise to the American people. We will keep fighting until all exposures to PFAS end and the chemical companies responsible for business-related human rights abuses are held fully accountable," **said Emily Donovan, co-founder of Clean Cape Fear.**

More details about funding to address PFAS in Drinking Water

Through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, EPA is making an unprecedented \$21 billion available to strengthen our nation's drinking water systems, including by addressing PFAS contamination. Of that, \$9 billion is specifically for tackling PFAS and emerging contaminants. The financing programs delivering this funding are part of President Biden's Justice40 Initiative [↗](https://www.whitehouse.gov/environmentaljustice/justice40/)

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/environmentaljustice/justice40/>, which set the goal that 40% of the overall benefits of certain federal investments flow to disadvantaged communities that have been historically marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution.

Additionally, EPA has a nationwide Water Technical Assistance program to help small, rural, and disadvantaged communities access federal resources by working directly with water systems to identify challenges like PFAS; develop plans; build technical, managerial, and financial capacity; and apply for water infrastructure funding. Learn more about EPA's Water Technical Assistance programs

<https://epa.gov/water-infrastructure/water-technical-assistance-programs>.

More details about the final PFAS drinking water standards:

- For PFOA and PFOS, EPA is setting a Maximum Contaminant Level Goal, a non-enforceable health-based goal, at zero. This reflects the latest science showing that there is no level of exposure to these contaminants without risk of health impacts, including certain cancers.
- EPA is setting enforceable Maximum Contaminant Levels at 4.0 parts per trillion for PFOA and PFOS, individually. This standard will reduce exposure from these PFAS in our drinking water to the lowest levels that are feasible for effective implementation.
- For PFNA, PFHxS, and "GenX Chemicals," EPA is setting the MCLGs and MCLs at 10 parts per trillion.
- Because PFAS can often be found together in mixtures, and research shows these mixtures may have combined health impacts, EPA is also setting a limit for any mixture of two or more of the following PFAS: PFNA, PFHxS, PFBS, and "GenX Chemicals."

EPA is issuing this rule after reviewing extensive research and science on how PFAS affects public health, while engaging with the water sector and with state regulators to ensure effective implementation. EPA also considered 120,000 comments on the proposed rule from a wide variety of stakeholders.

Background:

PFAS, also known as ‘forever chemicals,’ are prevalent in the environment. PFAS are a category of chemicals used since the 1940s to repel oil and water and resist heat, which makes them useful in everyday products such as nonstick cookware, stain resistant clothing, and firefighting foam. The science is clear that exposure to certain PFAS over a long period of time can cause cancer and other illnesses. In addition, PFAS exposure during critical life stages such as pregnancy or early childhood can also result in adverse health impacts.

Across the country, PFAS contamination is impacting millions of people’s health and wellbeing. People can be exposed to PFAS through drinking water or food contaminated with PFAS, by coming into contact with products that contain PFAS, or through workplace exposures in certain industries.

Since EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan announced the PFAS Strategic Roadmap <<https://epa.gov/pfas/pfas-strategic-roadmap-epas-commitments-action-2021-2024>> in October 2021, EPA has taken action – within the Biden-Harris Administration’s whole-of-government approach – by advancing science and following the law to safeguard public health, protect the environment, and hold polluters accountable. The actions described in the PFAS Strategic Roadmap each represent important and meaningful steps to protect communities from PFAS contamination. Cumulatively, these actions will build upon one another and lead to more enduring and protective solutions. In December 2023, the EPA released its second annual report on PFAS progress <<https://epa.gov/system/files/documents/2023-12/epas-pfas-strategic-roadmap-dec-2023508v2.pdf>>. The report highlights significant accomplishments achieved under the EPA’s PFAS Strategic Roadmap.

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