

The Public Right to Know What Toxic Forever Chemicals Are In Drinking Water

Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper Statement on Federal PFAS Regulation

On 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). PFAS is a term that describes an entire class of chemicals, commonly referred to as “forever chemicals.” It is estimated that there are at least 12,000 chemicals that fall within the PFAS class that are in use today. They are thought to be biopersistent, meaning they remain in organisms indefinitely without breaking down, and they are known to be bioaccumulative, meaning that over time, they build up in ever increasing amounts in people, wildlife, aquatic life, and the environment.

PFAS chemicals are highly toxic and exposure has been linked to deadly cancers, impacts to the liver and heart, thyroid disease, and immune and developmental damage in infants and children, among other health impacts.

“We exist in a world where we have accepted the fact that society willingly pollutes its own drinking water, and our modern regulatory systems allow thousands of chemical constituents to be put into use without adequate analysis and safeguards to protect human health or the environment,” said **Jill Jedlicka, Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper Executive Director**. “However, with this announcement from the Biden-Harris Administration, we are seeing the strongest action that EPA has taken to improve drinking water standards in decades. These legally enforceable drinking water standards help reduce exposure to PFAS chemicals and when combined with the \$1 billion in new federal funding to help states implement testing and treatment, we are finally seeing meaningful action. We applaud the work of advocates, scientists and the federal government who have all worked together to get us here.”

This new rule sets limits for five individual PFAS chemicals: 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.”

In addition, the EPA is also announcing nearly \$1 billion in newly available funding 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.

Locally, the extent of PFAS contamination in the Great Lakes and Western New York continues to emerge, with the most recent incident of documented drinking water contamination in the Village of Mayville, NY. Surface water sampling by Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper in 2022 found 100% detection rate of PFAS compounds in all 13 waterways

that we tested, including finding relatively high levels of the newly regulated chemicals PFOA, PFOS, and PFHxS in a major tributary to the Niagara River. Surface water detections do not directly correlate to drinking water contamination, but the presence of high levels of these chemicals in our local waters present a long-term, generational risk to our drinking water sources, and justifies the need for increased monitoring of all our drinking water systems. Fortunately for now, the most recent publicly available data from Erie and Niagara County public drinking water systems (2022) show no exceedances of the new regulatory limits of 4 PPT for PFOA and PFOS.

With the new federal regulation, all public water systems have three years to complete their initial monitoring for the identified chemicals and inform the public of the level of PFAS measured in their drinking water. Where PFAS is found at levels that exceed these standards, public water systems must implement solutions to reduce PFAS in their drinking water within five years.

According to EPA, the new limits are achievable using a range of available technologies and approaches including granular activated carbon, reverse osmosis, and ion exchange systems. For additional protection from PFAS compounds, residents can deploy the use of home filters that include granular activated carbon, reverse osmosis and ion exchange systems. These are far better alternatives than using bottled water. Bottled water is not consistently regulated or monitored and contains and contributes to microplastic pollution in our Great Lakes.

Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper applauds the EPA for implementing national standards for all states to protect communities from PFAS contamination in drinking water. This is a monumental first step, and New York State now has the opportunity to expand its leadership and accelerate the implementation and impact of these new standards for all communities.

Additional resources:

<https://bnwaterkeeper.org/pfas-pfoa-pfos/>

<https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/biden-harris-administration-finalizes-first-ever-national-drinking-water-standard>

<https://waterkeeper.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Waterkeeper-Alliance-PFAS-Report-FINAL-10.14.22.pdf>

<https://www.epa.gov/dwcapacity/emerging-contaminants-ec-small-or-disadvantaged-communities-grant-sdc>

https://eany.org/press_release/eany-statement-on-historic-epa-action-to-address-toxic-pfas-in-drinking-water/