

Missourians Need Greater Protections from “Forever Chemicals” and Plastics

PFAS - per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances- is an umbrella term for a multitude of substances that resist grease, oil, water, and heat and we have now learned are “forever chemicals.” They cannot breakdown and cause harm to people, wildlife, and our overall environment.

Agriculture/Hunting & Fishing Impacts:

While drinking water has gotten much of the attention, and is the primary method of exposure for most Americans, anglers and hunters who eat what they catch are at an increased risk of exposure. A single serving of wild-caught freshwater fish can expose an adult to the same dose of PFAS they would receive from a month of drinking contaminated water. Consumption advisories for deer are already in place in some midwestern states.

Because of PFAS use in seed coatings and certain pesticides, specific PFAS chemicals like perfluorobutane sulfonate (PFBS) pose a greater risk of contamination in rural areas. Compounding that problem, PFBS is more mobile than some other PFAS and can be carried long distances in flowing water. Farms throughout the United States have suffered massive losses, and in some cases even had to permanently close after testing revealed their cattle were contaminated with PFAS.

PFAS contamination is of particular concern to the cattle industry, where PFAS find their way into beef through contaminated soil, grass, or feed, largely due to the presence of PFAS in biosolids, which many farmers use as a soil amendment.

Health Impacts:

These “forever chemicals” are persistent pollutants that do not break down, build up in human tissue, and are found in the blood of 99% of Americans. Drinking water is the primary method of exposure for most Americans, and is the primary place where decreasing PFAS exposure can make an impact.

PFAS have negative impacts on the endocrine system that regulates hormone production, and been linked to liver and kidney disease, cancers, including testicular and kidney cancers, increased risk of high blood pressure in pregnant women, and low birthweight in newborns.

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Environmental Impacts:

We know that PFAS pose a threat to drinking water safety, but very little is being done to address the problem – federal regulations are focusing on a tiny fraction of the contaminants, and the costs to install new treatment technology is staggering. (Estimates range from \$1 to \$3+ Billion per year to remove PFAS from drinking water nationwide).

IIJA/BIL money cannot cover this infrastructure needs deficit - for PFAS specifically or for drinking and wastewater treatment more generally. Polluters should pay to clean up the water they've contaminated, instead of shifting the burden to Missouri utilities and municipalities facing staggering costs for water treatment through no cost of their own.

Trying to regulate each one of these over 9,000 chemicals on an individual basis is an exercise in futility due to the time necessary to develop meaningful regulations for each individual formulation. We need to cast a wide net and defer to the expertise of our drinking water treatment plant operators and utilities. They know when water is safe to drink for Missourians, and allowing them to raise the alarm when changes need to be made, without having to worry about the financial burden of upgrading facilities to ensure our drinking water is safe.

Plastics Impacts:

Plastic and microplastic pollution is a major issue, and it's not one that current methods and rates of recycling can address.

Plastic waste contamination is not an issue that we can wait to act on. A recent study by St. Louis University researchers found microplastics were present in a St. Louis County cave that had been closed off from human access for nearly 30 years. Unless we start tackling this problem now, our children and grandchildren will be dealing with the impacts of plastic pollution into the next century.

Plastic waste impacts urban and suburban areas differently than rural ones. The one-size-fits-all approach to plastic pollution reduction currently dictated by Missouri law a poor fit for this kind of problem.