

Sludge

Sewage sludge, also known as biosolids, are a semisolid byproduct of the wastewater treatment process. Sludge is often land applied on agricultural fields as fertilizer as a means of disposal. (1)

However, this land application can be quite harmful: when the land-applied sludge contains pollutants from the waste streams entering the wastewater treatment process, **that contamination can leach into groundwater, runoff into surface water, and enter our food system.**

PFAS

Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) is a class of over 15,000 man-made chemicals with exceptionally strong chemical bonds. **PFAS are nicknamed “forever chemicals,” due to their environmental persistence.** PFAS can be found in many consumer goods such as cosmetics, food packaging, nonstick pans, stain lifters, clothing, and carpeting.

PFAS binds to proteins in our body, building up in our organs and blood. The most common PFAS compounds have been found to be extremely potent carcinogens, and also have been linked to (among other health issues) fetal development issues, thyroid disease, liver damage, immune system suppression, and reduced fertility.

PFAS is bioaccumulative, meaning that when PFAS enters our food system, it concentrates up the food chain, with top-level consumers (like humans) experienced the highest levels of PFAS in our bodies. (2)

We need legislative action to...

- **Test our sludge for PFAS contaminants**
- **Ban the land application of sludge containing PFAS**
- **Fund alternative disposal methods** for sludge containing PFAS
- **Compensate farmers** whose land has been contaminated by PFAS
- **Remediate** land that has been contaminated with PFAS

A 2025 EPA risk assessment found that the land application of sludge containing just 1 part per billion (ppb) of PFOA or PFOS can lead to human health risks exceeding EPA acceptable thresholds. (3)

Sources:

- (1) <https://www.epa.gov/biosolids/frequent-questions-and-answers-draft-sewage-sludge-risk-assessment-pfoa-and-pfos>
- (2) <https://www.epa.gov/biosolids/draft-sewage-sludge-risk-assessment-perfluorooctanoic-acid-pfoa-and-perfluorooctane>
- (3) <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/topics/agents/pfc>

Further Resources:

- <https://www.thenewlede.org/2025/01/pfas-in-sludge-spread-on-farmland-poses-health-risks-epa-report-says/assessment-perfluorooctanoic-acid-pfoa-and-perfluorooctane>
- <https://www.ewg.org/news-insights/news/2025/01/forever-chemicals-sludge-may-taint-nearly-70-million-farmland-acres>

