



Toolkit to Advocate on National Toxic Safeguards

Messaging, Tips and Materials to Urge Congress to Pass the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that Contains Key Regulations on PFAS Chemicals



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Overview

Right now, the House of Representatives and Senate have a major opportunity to pass strong and urgent protections against per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) — chemicals that cause contamination in water systems. The chemicals are linked to deadly diseases like thyroid cancer. They harm the immune and reproductive systems, damage the developing fetus, and may permanently compromise children's brain development and behavior. The PFAS contamination crisis is at a breaking point: more than 100 million Americans are drinking PFAS-contaminated water and over 400 contaminated sites exist in the United States — many on and near military bases.

The 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) is a bipartisan, military budget bill that includes several pieces to regulate widespread PFAS use and contamination. But in what seems to be an ongoing trend by the Trump administration, the White House has threatened to veto the NDAA over two key provisions that would protect Americans — including service members and their families who've been drinking contaminated drinking water for decades — against PFAS chemicals.

Democrats and Republicans have worked for a strong NDAA that includes several, common-sense solutions to our country's PFAS crisis (see amendments below).

Background On PFAS Problem

Communities around the United States are facing grave threats to their drinking water and health due to Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS). This class of chemicals are widely used to make carpets, fabrics for furniture, Teflon coatings for cookware, paper packaging for food and other everyday materials. They're even used in firefighting foam (aqueous film forming foam; AFFF) to extinguish commercial and military fires.

PFAS chemicals can't be broken down in an environment and effectively poison water sources. Right now, scientists estimate that more than 100 million Americans are drinking PFAS-contaminated water. This contamination is strongly linked to cancer, thyroid problems, reproductive system damage and stunting of children's growth and development.

A few of the important provisions in the NDAA that will help safeguard Americans from toxic PFAS chemicals:

- Quickly phase out military use of PFAS in firefighting foam
- Require the Department of Defense (DOD) to provide clean water to agricultural producers and dairies with contaminated water supplies
- Require community notification of DOD PFAS detections on and near military bases
- Accelerate PFAS cleanup near military and other federal installations
- Set limits on PFAS discharges into drinking water supplies
- Halt unregulated incineration — the dangerous burning — of PFAS wastes that add toxics into the air
- Expand water quality monitoring for PFAS
- Provide additional \$5 million for Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) study of PFAS contaminated communities
- Require government oversight to study DOD's failure to clean-up PFAS contamination
- Create an online health database for military members
- Designate PFAS as hazardous substances under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) known also as the Superfund law.



Ask

Congress must not give into Trump's veto threat, and pass this strong NDAA with ALL provisions to regulate PFAS. Implementing these urgent safeguards will help to protect service members, families and children in frontline communities.

Talking Points

ON the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)-

- We need to stop the continued polluting of our water by ending the use of PFAS and clean up existing contamination.
- For years, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the military have known about PFAS contamination and failed to protect communities. It's time for Congress to act and hold them accountable in requiring chemical companies and the military to cleanup PFAS contamination.
- We must ban the use of PFAS in military firefighting foam as quickly as possible. The Senate passed a version that set a strict three year phase-out. This action alone will go a long way to stop the continued pollution of drinking water.
 - The banning of these dangerous foams is not only necessary, it's achievable.
 - Governments in Washington and Colorado have already banned the use of PFAS in foams in their states
 - More PFAS-free foams are being introduced every year and the military can easily meet this deadline.
- Communities and water companies have already paid millions to clean up contamination. Adding PFAS to Superfund and Clean Water Act Hazardous Substances lists will ensure faster cleanup of polluted sites and drinking water.

- The NDAA amendments add important authorities for EPA to regulate PFAS discharges into water, to authorize clean up of contaminated sites, and would pause the risky and poorly studied-practice of disposing of PFAS in waste incinerators.
- This NDAA can achieve commonsense, urgent first steps to regulate a contamination crisis that's currently affecting over 100 million Americans and harming communities across the country.

ON per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)-

- PFAS are linked to deadly diseases like thyroid cancer, they detriment the immune and reproductive systems, damage the developing fetus, and may permanently compromise children's brain development and behavior.
- The chemicals can't be broken down in the environment, build-up in people and wildlife, and cause irreversible damages.
- Everyone, no matter zip code, gender or race, deserves clean drinking water. We must safeguard frontline communities from the damage of PFAS.
- The health of moms, kids, and future generations depend on strong action by the federal government.
- We must call on the government to protect public health and the environment. For populations most susceptible to chemical contamination — like women,

children and servicemembers — we need solutions centered on phasing out these chemicals and making urgent the cleanup of the contamination left behind.

How To Engage

Get engaged in our efforts to address PFAS contamination and protect your community from PFAS chemicals!

- **In-District Meetings/ Letters to Congress throughout September/ October:**

- ◀ [How to set up a meeting with your legislator](#)

- **Host a writing party** where concerned people can write letters urging their local official to take action (See guidance right below).

Guidance For Submitting Opinion Pieces

Op-Eds: Op-eds are longer opinion pieces (500-750 words) with a strong message urging a decisionmaker to take an action. Signers directly impacted by the issue or in some form of leadership make powerful authors.

If you would like help drafting an op-ed on the issue of PFAS and NDAA, contact Courtney Bourgoin at courtney.bourgoin@sierraclub.org.

Letters-to-the-Editor (LTEs): LTEs are short (150-250 word) opinion pieces with punchy messages calling for direct action. Everyone and anyone with a stake in this issue is encouraged to submit LTEs. See samples below.

Sample Letters to the Editor

To find local papers and submission guidelines, click [here](#).

Example 1 - Public Health (253 words)

Americans across the country have unknowingly been exposed to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) that have been linked to cancer, kidney disease, thyroid conditions and auto-immune disorders. These chemicals cause parents to live in fear over their drinking water and how it puts them and their families at risk. Despite the changing social norms, women are still disproportionately exposed to toxic chemicals found in household products — and PFAS are found in cleaning products and cosmetics. It is time the federal government put the safety of its people ahead of political differences and regulated these substances while holding the corporations responsible for this contamination accountable.

Thankfully, Congress can take decisive action to address the crisis in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which contains critical provisions that will protect people and their families from these dangerous chemicals. Congress must pass these common sense measures and the President must sign them into law. This package will take a desperately-needed first step in 1. Ending all ongoing uses of PFAS in consumer products and in military firefighting foams, ideally within 3 years. 2. Expanding federal monitoring of PFAS so we know where it is and who it's affecting, because states can't carry out these expensive projects alone. 3. Require EPA to regulate PFAS discharges to water, clean up contaminated sites, and stop the incineration of PFAS waste. Our nation and our children's health and future deserve to be held above political differences. Republicans and Democrats must work together to protect our health and pass the PFAS amendments.

Example 2 - Mothers/ Families (239 words)

Imagine walking through a store and having to question every product you use, or turning on your faucet and having to question whether or not the water will harm yourself and your family. As a mother, this is my reality and it's time for Congress to take action. For years, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has failed to act to hold polluters—like chemical companies and the military— responsible for their unchecked use of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) toxic chemicals and their failure to clean up the contamination they've created. Most people haven't even heard of PFAS chemicals, yet virtually everyone has PFAS in their blood. Doctors are confirming that synthetic PFAS chemicals are hormone-disrupting— harming fertility and the ability to have a healthy pregnancy. They also affect children's immune systems and reproductive development. I want to be able to protect my family from potential health issues associated with these chemicals, and Congress has a key opportunity to help families across the country do just that. The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) contains critical provisions that will protect people and their families from these dangerous chemicals. I fear it's impossible to “shop my way out of the problem”— avoiding all encounters with this toxic chemical— because PFAS is in almost everything we use—non-stick pans, stainfree carpet, cleaning products and fast food packaging. It is imperative that Congress passes these common sense measures in order to ensure our safety.

Example 3 - National PFAS Crisis (220 words)

In Wyoming, Pennsylvania and in almost every state — per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) chemicals are spreading all across the country and harming our communities. Virtually everyone has these “forever chemicals” in their blood. For too long, the government has failed to hold those responsible for PFAS pollution accountable. Meanwhile, these chemicals are rapidly leaching off of airports and military bases into our water and food systems. They are nearly impossible to avoid. The root cause of this chemical contamination is the lack of safeguards put on dangerous chemical. Thankfully, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) contains critical provisions that will protect people and their families from these dangerous chemicals. This package will: 1. Ending all ongoing uses of PFAS in consumer products and in military firefighting foams within 3 years. 2. Expanding federal monitoring of PFAS so we know where it is and who it's affecting, because states can't carry out these expensive projects alone. 3. Require the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to regulate PFAS discharges into water, clean up contaminated sites, and stop the dangerous incineration of PFAS waste. Our country's public health leaders have not protected us from this contamination, but there is still time to prevent further damage. We need to unite together and make sure these provisions to get passed in order to keep our nation safe.

Example 4 - Military/ Veteran (230 words):

As a [veteran/ service member], I've seen our community suffer the consequences of polluted drinking water in [location]— right where a drinking water crisis is boiling over. Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are used in military and firefighting foam and are known as “forever chemicals” because of the fact they never break down. These chemicals contaminate our drinking water and have been linked to cancer, kidney disease, thyroid conditions and auto-immune disorders. Politics aside, the issue of drinking water contamination is

one that cares little for state borders, seriously affects families, and does not discriminate. This is a national issue and is not the responsibility of states to act on this threat alone. The “hotspots” for PFAS contamination are growing and popping up in different locations every week. Our country’s public health leaders have not protected us from this contamination, but there is still time to prevent further damage. The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) contains key provisions in preventing further damage from these dangerous chemicals and it is imperative that Congress pass these common sense measures. Provisions that include quickly phasing out military use of PFAS in firefighting foam. It is time to protect service members and their families (who’ve been drinking contaminated drinking water for decades) and pass these common sense measures in order to ensure the future safety of our families and children.

For guidance on writing and submitting longer opinion pieces, [see here](#).

Social Media

Twitter posts:

- 100+ million Americans across U.S. states including [your state] drink water contaminated with industrial chemicals like #PFAS. Congress needs to pass a strong military budget (NDAA) with ALL provisions to regulate PFAS for the safety of our service members and families. **+ACTION ALERT**
- What’s in our water? Everyday the government doesn’t take action on #PFAS, polluters are putting families, our military and communities at risk. It’s imperative that Congress passes a strong military budget (NDAA) with ALL provisions that include regulating #PFAS chemicals. **+ACTION ALERT**
- .@rep [tag your congressperson/ senator] - Protect military families from toxic #PFAS chemicals! Pass a military budget (NDAA) that includes measures to safeguard families and communities. **+ACTION ALERT**

Facebook post:

Across the country, PFAS contamination is tainting our drinking water. The chemicals are persistent, they can’t be easily broken down and cause serious health concerns — cancer, thyroid problems and danger during pregnancy. Congress must keep and pass a strong military budget (NDAA) with ALL provisions to regulate PFAS. Implementing these urgent safeguards will help to protect service members, families and children. **+ACTION ALERT**

Instagram Post:

In communities from Colorado to Michigan, PFAS contamination is tainting our drinking water and making us sick. The chemicals are persistent, they can’t be broken down, cause cancer and harm children’s health. Congress must keep and pass a strong military budget (NDAA) that includes ALL provisions to regulate PFAS. Implementing these urgent safeguards will help to protect service members, families and children. **+ACTION ALERT**

Reference Materials

- [National Law Review](#): More Background on the PFAS Issue in the NDAA
- Background Series: Sharon’s Lerner’s [Bad Chemistry](#) series in The Intercept
- Map of contaminated drinking water: [The EWG/SSEHRI map](#) of PFAS water contamination with more than 170 sites of documented PFAS contamination over 40 states.
- Blog [Disproportionate Effects of PFAS on Women and Children](#)
- Technical background on PFAS chemicals by the Interstate Technology Regulatory Council [Factsheets on PFAS](#)

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