

EPA draft groundwater rules disappoint clean water advocates

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The Environmental Protection Agency proposed draft cleanup standards Thursday for groundwater contaminated by so-called forever chemicals, but advocates who urged the adoption of such standards said they were

too weak.

The proposal addresses PFAS compounds, which are so slow to degrade they've been nicknamed forever chemicals.

The compounds, per- and polyfluoroalkyl, were used for decades in manufacturing products such as cookware, microwave popcorn bags, carpeting, rainwear and fire retardants because they make surfaces resistant to heat, [water](#) and staining. They're also included in some firefighting foam used by the military.

Tougher standards previously reported to be in the draft, including the designation of levels that would trigger the distribution of bottled water in communities served by tainted [water sources](#), were not in the interim recommendations released for public comment.

The proposed recommendations did include a provision asserting "responsible parties will address" contamination of groundwater that could become a drinking water source. Critics quickly cited that as evidence polluters may not be required to clean up all contamination.

If adopted, the recommendations would urge [federal agencies](#) with jurisdiction over known or potential drinking water sites to clean up contamination to concentrations lower than 70 parts per trillion of two PFAS chemicals.

But the exclusion of an emergency cleanup level, which would have required the distribution of bottled water, may lead to additional scrutiny of whether the Defense Department, which is said to be opposed to such a specification, may have played a role in their absence in the proposal.

Repeatedly taking aim at the Pentagon, Senate Environment and Public Works ranking member Thomas R. Carper said in a news release the

guidance "fails to adequately protect public health from this emerging crisis."

"(EPA) Administrator Wheeler said that safe drinking water is the greatest environmental challenge facing our world, yet, again, we see that EPA is not addressing this issue in the manner in which it demands, nor with the urgency in which Americans deserve," the Delaware Democrat said.

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