

# With \$3 billion PFAS cleanup price tag looming, Pentagon looks to industry for ideas

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Staring down a \$3 billion—and growing—tab to clean up water sources at military installations across the country that are contaminated with cancer-causing chemicals linked to firefighting foam, the Defense Department is now in discussions with private companies about potential cleanup solutions that might reduce the cost.

During a test at Tyndall Air Force Base in Florida last August, Gradient Energy Services applied its evaporation technology to 814,000 gallons of contaminated rainwater. The water had accumulated in the fire pits at the Air Force Civil Engineer Center's fire training and research area, and had to be contained for disposal because it contained the [chemical compounds](#).

Tyndall had "freshwater that was contaminated with PFAS," said Gradient technology manager Javier Casas, referring to per- and polyfluoroalkyl man-made chemical compounds that are found in low levels in everyday household products, such as the non-stick coating on cooking pans, but that are highly concentrated in foam used by the military to put out aviation fires.

PFAS exposure has been linked to cancers, reproductive problems and birth defects.

"DoD has been developing more cost effective techniques for treatment of groundwater impacted by PFAS since 2011," said Defense Department spokesman Charles Prichard. "Several of the technologies

are now being demonstrated in the field."

In the test, Gradiant heated the [contaminated water](#) and circulated it through a column filled with perforated trays. "As that water passes through the trays, you have ambient air blowing in through the bottom that bubbles through the water," Casas said. "Because of the increased temperature, you are able to extract freshwater, which is released through evaporation."

Of the 814,400 gallons that were initially contaminated, Gradiant was able to extract 743,400 gallons of freshwater, which left Tyndall with a smaller amount of PFAS-contaminated water to remove from the base.

"The wastewater disposal test results are encouraging, and we see it as a great example of how the Air Force and Department of Defense are working with private industry and other partners to find innovative solutions for this national issue," said Mark Kinkade, a spokesman for the Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center.

At bases and the communities surrounding them nationwide, decades of use of the foam has meant the compounds have seeped into underground water reservoirs, soil and above-ground bodies of [water](#).

As of the Pentagon's latest assessment, PFAS has been discovered in [water sources](#) in at least 651 military facilities.

In March, Maureen Sullivan, deputy assistant secretary of defense for environment, told McClatchy that based on current technology and previous cleanups, complete PFAS remediation could take at least 30 years and that costs had risen from an estimated \$2 billion to at least \$3 billion.

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