

# White House environmental official tours PFAS-site in Minnesota

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A member of President Joe Biden's administration stopped in the city of Lake Elmo, Minnesota, on May 6 to talk PFAS with local officials, visiting an area that's been at the forefront of contamination just three

weeks after the Biden administration released the first-ever drinking water standards for the so-called "forever" chemical.

Brenda Mallory, chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, also met with students and staff at Tartan High School in Oakdale before visiting the fishing pier at Lake Elmo.

"This is so striking," Mallory said, speaking to reporters and local officials while standing on the lakeshore. "This is a beautiful site, and the idea that there's this gigantic toxic [lake](#) that people aren't able to actually fully take advantage of is sobering."

The city of Lake Elmo has reported PFAS contamination in several of its drinking [water wells](#), like the nearby communities of Oakdale, Cottage Grove, Woodbury, Stillwater and others. The drinking water standard announced last month by the Environmental Protection Agency sets a legally-enforceable requirement for utilities to reduce PFAS levels to the lowest level they can be reliably measured. The administration says it will protect 100 million people from PFAS exposure.

Mallory said it will take "a longstanding engagement" to clean PFAS from the environment, but that designating it a hazardous substance is a start. The government has also worked to create PFAS alternatives, she said.

"Ultimately, we need to be in a place where we are not using PFAS any place that we don't need to use PFAS."

Mallory said the Defense Department has said there are some uses that touch on issues of national security that for now have no viable alternative, however.

Her tour of Lake Elmo at the Lake Elmo Park Reserve was guided by

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency commissioner Katrina Kessler, and attended by local officials from Lake Elmo and Washington County.

"Any attention that can be brought to it—so people can understand it and hopefully get behind cleaning it up—is great," said Lake Elmo Mayor Charles Cadenhead.

"This is not a [political issue](#) it's a logistical and timeliness issue," said Jeff Holtz, a member of the Lake Elmo City Council.

The county has been supporting the cleanups in multiple cities in the area, said Washington County commissioner Fran Miron, but funding remains a huge concern, especially for smaller communities.

"We're dealing with it with the funds that we have, with the knowledge that we have," said Miron. "And continue to advocate for more funding either through the state or the federal government."

Mallory also met with the family of Amara Strande, the Oakdale resident whose advocacy helped lead to last year's passage of Amara's law, which bans the use of PFAS in all products except those deemed by regulators to be essential. Strande, a Tartan High School graduate, died one year ago of a rare cancer her family blames on PFAS contamination near the school, although the connection can't be proven.

"I think Amara would have been wowed by this," said her mother, Dana Strande, speaking of a federal official visiting Lake Elmo to talk about the contamination. "She would have been like, 'Oh, they're listening. They've listened and they understand it's my community.'"

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