



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement

**Chairwoman Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ)
of the Subcommittee on Environment**

Joint Hearing of
Environment and Research & Technology Subcommittees:
Forever Chemicals: Research and Development for Addressing the PFAS Problem

December 7, 2021

Good morning and welcome to today's joint hearing of the Environment and Research and Technology Subcommittees on PFAS research and development.

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS are a class of human-made chemicals. They're used in many industrial and everyday consumer products such as firefighting foam, food packaging, nonstick cookware, carpets, and even dental floss.

PFAS are known as "forever chemicals" due to their widespread use, persistence in the environment, and strong molecular structure that makes them nearly impossible to break down. Despite being in use since the 1940's, PFAS are considered contaminants of emerging concern, as we continue to understand the negative human health and ecological impacts of these substances. There is growing consensus that PFAS are linked to negative health consequences including but not limited to, cancer, infertility, liver and kidney disease, hormone disruption, and damage to the immune system especially in children.

As a former Navy pilot, I have spent countless days on military bases. Unbeknownst to me and my fellow servicemembers, I was in frequent contact with PFAS. Firefighting foam used on military bases, also known as Aqueous Film Forming Foaming or "AFFF", contains PFAS. AFFF has caused PFAS contamination at levels deemed unsafe by the CDC. That is why I helped secure funding in the National Defense Authorization Act to help clean up our military installations, including the Picatinny Arsenal in north Jersey.

The extensive use of PFAS has led to most, if not all, Americans to have these forever chemicals in their body to some degree. This is something I'm seeing across my district, from North Haledon to Verona to Stanhope – and everywhere in between. In fact, this issue is so critical in my district, that one of my ten community project submissions was for PFAS remediation in Hopatcong.

While this issue is extensive in all communities across the country, it has disproportionate impacts on small communities who have trouble bearing the expense of remediation. It is concerning how little we know about these harmful chemicals and, even further, our limited understanding about what we still need to learn.

I am proud of my home state of New Jersey for being the first in the nation to set PFAS drinking water standards. But we have only just begun to scratch the surface. Unfortunately, actions we are taking in New Jersey to reduce our exposure to PFAS through drinking water are expensive for our municipalities. I'm proud that the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is making real investments to fund lead pipe remediation and removal of PFAS contaminants from water systems, ensuring we have safe drinking water but without doing so on the backs of taxpayers in New Jersey and across the country. This is a great start.

But given the scale of this issue, and the cost to our communities, it's clear we need to do more to support our municipalities fighting these harmful chemicals. So, we must support R&D to make remediation easier and less expensive. If we don't, the costs to our communities' health will continue to compound, and that is unacceptable.

There are many outstanding questions related to PFAS fate and transport, toxicity, exposure pathways, treatment and destruction, remediation, and essential use. We know PFAS are dangerous and harmful, but we don't know exactly how many PFAS chemicals there are – but they're in the thousands. In many cases, we don't have the ability to detect PFAS that are present or measure their concentration. Questions also remain about global production volumes of PFAS, where PFAS are used, and PFAS hotspots.

To answer these questions, we must support an interdisciplinary, collaborative, and integrated approach. It is critical to develop partnerships between state and local entities, academia, non-governmental stakeholders, and the Federal government.

Due to the cross-cutting nature of PFAS, numerous Federal agencies are essential to addressing the problem. The National Institutes of Health's National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), DoD, NIST, NSF, NOAA, FAA, and of course EPA—all are essential to conducting and funding research efforts for PFAS.

This is an even more timely hearing for the Committee as the EPA has just released their PFAS Strategic Roadmap, a comprehensive strategy to combat the persistent challenges of PFAS.

I am particularly pleased to see the EPA prioritizing investments in research, development, and innovation to strengthen our understanding of PFAS and accelerate remediation efforts. Additionally, the Roadmap's emphasis on protections for disadvantaged communities that have been disproportionately impacted by PFAS is key as we strive to address environmental justice concerns.

There is significant ongoing PFAS research and development activities, and even more in the pipeline. That is why I am pleased to welcome our esteemed panel of PFAS experts who are well-versed on the current state of research and development. I look forward to hearing their

testimony to better understand the gaps in our scientific understanding of PFAS and to also identify future research needs.

I am also eager to hear their recommendations for how this Committee can help facilitate research and development collaborations between Federal and non-Federal entities and identify opportunities for interagency coordination at the Federal level.