

# Rural Water Issues Advisory [4/1/2019]

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**Senate PFAS Hearing:** On Thursday, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee held a hearing concerning the federal government's response to PFAS contamination of water resources including drinking water supplies ([hearing video](#)). NRWA Regulatory Committee Chairman Paul Fulgham from Utah attended the hearing. Fulgham was in Washington to attend the AWWA Water Utility Council spring meeting. The EPA Assistant Administrator for Water testified and explained the recently announced [EPA PFAS Action Plan](#). Some Senators have asked for NRWA comments on how the federal government should respond. Please forward to [us](#) any comments you have on an appropriate federal response for small and rural communities. One such response discussed is a three-step assistance initiative:

1. Federal support of testing for communities vulnerable to PFAS contamination of their drinking water. Michigan just completed such a program ([cite](#)). Testing is *relatively* inexpensive per community. A non-regulatory federal agency should lead any testing assistance program.
2. Technical assistance to communities with detection regarding available treatment technologies, health effects information, and available funding sources for treatment including recovering treatment costs from responsible parties.
3. Regarding a federal/EPA regulatory level (the so-called MCL), small and rural communities urge EPA and Congress to resist calls for a national regulatory drinking water standard for PFAS and instead advance alternative federal initiatives to **assist** communities dealing with PFAS contamination (NRWA [11/21/18, comments](#) to EPA - (EPA reply to comments attached to document)).

**PFAS in Biosolids:** Much of NRWA's attention has been focused on PFAS in drinking water ([NRWA comments to EPA](#)). Led by the leadership of Michigan Rural Water Association's [Chris Kenyon](#), NRWA is now increasing focus on PFAS in biosolids and wastewater effluent. Last week, EPA testified before the Senate on the agency's agenda to deal with PFAS under the Clean Water Act ([hearing video at 1:14:40](#)). Also last week, a news feature **in Maine** reported on the growing concern that a state biosolid policy might have led to contaminated farmland across Maine in more than 175 sites. The issue gained attention in Maine following revelations that a dairy farm had elevated levels of the contaminant in its soil, water and milk. The state declared that "producers of sludge materials" proposed for application on the ground need to establish new testing and prove that all the sludge is below regulatory levels before it can be applied ([local news](#)). **In Michigan**, regulators are focused on PFAS passing through wastewater facilities. Each of the approximately 70 plants in Michigan treating industrial wastewater have to find PFAS users among their customer base and develop a plan to monitor the chemicals. This week, Michigan public television debuted a PFAS documentary, "The Forever Chemicals," a half-hour special about PFAS chemical contamination ([MI public television](#)).

**EPA Announces Changes in SRFs Supported by NRWA Past President:** On March 25, EPA announced [new guidance](#) for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) including: an increased amount of additional subsidy available to disadvantaged communities; and an increased maximum-authorized DWSRF loan term of up to 30 years for any DWSRF-eligible community or up to 40 years for a state-defined disadvantaged community. On May 19, 2017, NRWA Past President Steve Fletcher testified before the House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee and urged the committee to pass legislation to enact these DWSRF changes ([hearing video](#)). Thank you, Steve Fletcher; your work continues to help all small and rural communities.

**Manganese in the Drinking Water:** Pierre (SD) issues sudden “do not drink” advisory to public prompted by high levels of manganese in city water ([local news](#)). The manganese levels in the city’s water have not changed. However, increased concern by federal and state officials over the possible harmful effects of manganese has caused the state drinking water program to request that the city issue the advisory. City voters recently approved building a \$37 million water treatment plant to remove the naturally occurring element. The new water treatment plant is projected to raise the average water customer’s bill about 60 percent, from \$53 a month to \$83 a month. EPA established “health advisory” levels for manganese in [2004](#), but it is not regulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act with a maximum contaminant level (MCL). Drinking water with high levels of manganese for many years may cause behavioral changes and other nervous system effects, including slow and clumsy movements. EPA health advisory levels are not enforceable under the Safe Drinking Water Act, but do appear to be the antecedent of local action (e.g. [PFAS](#)). Do you believe that these health advisory levels are preferable to the existing regulatory systems of enforceable MCLs for drinking water contaminants of federal concern (please comment to [us](#))?

**EPA Accepting Comments on New Definition of Waters of the United States Until April 15th:** Late last year, the EPA [proposed a rule](#) to revise the definition of “waters of the United States” to clarify the scope of waters federally regulated under the Clean Water Act. The comment period on the proposed action will end on April 15, 2019.

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*The National Rural Water Association is the country’s largest public drinking water and sanitation supply organization with over 30,000 members. Safe drinking water and sanitation are generally recognized as the most essential public health, public welfare, and civic necessities.*

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