

# Rural Water Issues Advisory [4/8/2019]

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**Fifty Three Members of Congress Sign Letters to EPA and USDA Appropriations Committee in Support of Rural Water Funding Priorities** ([House letters](#)).

**Environmentalists' Win Case in Montana Limiting Use of Clean Water Act Variances:** Late last month, a federal judge ruled that a variance granted to dischargers of nitrogen and phosphorus approved by the state of Montana and EPA partially violates the Clean Water Act. In designing its water quality program, the state allowed for the use of 20-year variances from the base standards based on the cost and feasibility to individual wastewater utilities. An environmental group argued that the Clean Water Act does not allow consideration of economic impacts and that the variance essentially replaces the base standards without a path to reaching levels necessary to protect waterways. The judge found that the variances do not set out timelines that lead to compliance with base standards ([local news](#)).

**Minnesota Lowers Health-based Advisory Values PFOS to 15 PBB and Sets Value PFHxS at 47 PPB** ([local news](#)).

**Michigan Governor Directs State Agency to Establish PFAS Standard:** The governor indicated the standard would be ready by October. Some republicans are advocating that Michigan should defer to federal regulators ([local news](#)).

**New Jersey Proposes Most Stringent PFAS Standard in the County, of 14 PPB** ([local news](#)).

**TV News Feature - Hundreds in Nebraska Town Without Water and Sewer Due to Wash-out of Rural Water Line:** Collapse of a dam due to historic flooding took out a rural water line leaving hundreds of people without running water. Officials estimate fixing the dam and restoring the rural water line will cost over two million dollars and they set up a GoFundMe to raise money for the dam's repairs ([TV news](#)).

**E. Coli 0103 Outbreak Affects Over 70 People in Five States, Unknown Cause** ([news](#)).

**New EPA Administrator Presses for Better Risk Assessment Science:** Administrator Wheeler is asking top EPA scientists to develop new guidance aimed at harmonizing risk assessment practices across the agency which could advance implementation of the Administration's [proposed science transparency rule](#). The proposed rule could modify EPA policy on reliance of default linear dose-response models, which generally assume that any exposure to carcinogens carries some level of risk. EPA's 2005 Cancer Risk Assessment Guidance directs that EPA risk assessors use linear extrapolation as a default, or when the chemical is considered mutagenic. Nonlinear extrapolation can be used if there is sufficient evidence that a chemical has a non-mutagenic biological mechanism for producing cancer. The internal agency document includes several examples of issues it seeks to harmonize, including "linear vs. threshold dose response extrapolation, non-cancer hazard identifiers, and updating reference dose and reference concentration processes." On August 16, 2018, [NRWA filed comments](#) to EPA in support the Agency's proposal to promulgate a regulation to strengthen the transparency of science: *"NRWA fully supports a new regulation that requires use of peer-reviewed information, consistent data evaluation procedures, data transparency, and reproducible scientific assessments... For example, the EPA established a standard of 10 parts per billion (ppb) for arsenic in drinking water. The public naturally infers that any level above the standard is a health risk. However, when pressed by Congress to confirm this health risk, EPA*

*failed to do so. In 2002, EPA did not find that arsenic concentrations above their standard necessarily present an ‘unreasonable risk to health.’ In their reply to a Congressional inquiry, EPA stated that it is ‘determining what does not pose an unreasonable risk to health with respect to arsenic, rather than address the much more complex issue of what does constitute an unreasonable risk to health...’ All data used to craft SDWA policy including risk assessments {should be publicly available}. For example, a recent study (Mendez et al., J Expo Sci Environ Epidemiol 2017) analyzes the dose-response slope for certain public health endpoints for certain drinking water using data from the National Cancer Institute and the U.S. Geological Survey. The conclusion of this study could influence the current Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) Program that is developing an updated assessment of inorganic arsenic. However, the Mendez complete data set includes some data that is available to government agencies but not to the general public. Crafting a regulation that strengthens the transparency of science utilized by EPA will result in improved federal public policy and SDWA implementation. NRWA wants to ensure that the understanding of the public health risks of particular concentrations of substances (especially naturally occurring elements) in public drinking water are properly understood and applied in making public policy.”*

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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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