

# People of Faith Are Tackling Toxic PFAS Chemicals

## Protecting Our Families, Homes, Water, and Environment

### Toxic PFAS Chemicals Threaten All of Us

Washington State has been a national leader in safe chemical reform – Earth Ministry and the faith community played a key role in successful efforts to ban PBDEs, BPA, multiple forms of the toxic flame retardant Tris, and PFAS from food packaging materials such as fast-food wrappers and microwave popcorn bags. Yet the pervasive spread of PFAS chemicals has precipitated a public health and environmental crisis.

PFAS (perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl compounds) are used in a multitude of consumer products, including water-repellent fabrics, nonstick cookware such as Teflon, carpet and upholstery, some food packaging, and firefighting foam. Studies show that long-term exposure of very low concentrations of PFAS have been associated with thyroid disease, weakened immunity, infertility risks, and certain cancers. Because PFAS do not break down in the environment, they are known as “forever chemicals,” and are in the blood of virtually all Americans, including newborn babies.

As many as 110 million, or 1 in 3, people across the United States may be drinking water contaminated with toxic PFAS chemicals. In Washington, concentrations of PFAS above EPA’s health advisory level have been detected in drinking water in Issaquah, Coupeville, Airway Heights, the city of Dupont, and residential areas of Joint Base Lewis-McChord. PFAS have also been detected in groundwater in the Puget Sound Basin and in surface waters.

### Caring for Our Neighbors and Ourselves

People of faith know that we have a moral obligation to protect present and future generations from toxic contamination in the products we use every day. Exposure to PFAS chemicals can happen during product use or as PFAS accumulate in house dust and are released into indoor air.

Low-income and frontline communities are the first and most profoundly affected by toxic contamination. As people of faith, we are called to act for justice and ensure that policy makers at the state and national level put strong standards for PFAS in place and to also clean up contaminated sites.

### What You Can Do in Washington

Washington’s Department of Ecology is working on implementing SSB 5135, the Pollution Prevention for Our Future Act, which the faith community helped pass in the 2019 state legislative session. This new law requires Ecology to identify priority consumer products that contain PFAS and four other highly toxic chemicals and then adopt regulatory measures to reduce exposure. Earth Ministry is urging the department to address all forms of PFAS as a class of chemicals and phase out PFAS in products where safer alternatives are available, such as carpet and upholstery.

In addition, the Departments of Ecology and Health are developing a joint chemical action plan for PFAS, which is expected to be ready for public review and comment soon. The Board of Health also began rulemaking for PFAS in drinking water in 2017, which is also expected to run through 2019.

People of faith will have opportunities to make our voices heard in these public comment processes – stay tuned for more information from Earth Ministry. Together we will remind policymakers that PFAS contamination affects real families in Washington whom they have a moral obligation to protect.



Photo by Jack Zamryck