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HORSHAM WATER AND
SEWER AUTHORITY

Boyle bill pushes PFAS standards

By Chris Ullery

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H.R. 2377 would include the unregulated chemicals to the Safe Drinking Water Act, giving the EPA just two years to develop a national drinking water standard.

A federal standard could be coming for the unregulated chemicals known as PFAS contaminating drinking water for thousands in Bucks and Montgomery counties.

Congressman Brendan Boyle, D-2, of Philadelphia, announced last week his proposed amendment to the Safe Drinking Water Act was voted out of committee and nearing a vote on the House floor.

Boyle's bill requires the Environmental Protection Agency to develop a national primary drinking water standard for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances within the next two years.

"Too many families in Philadelphia and across America are at risk of drinking and consuming unsafe water," Boyle said in a news release.

"Public health is at stake while the EPA continues to drag its feet in setting enforceable limits on these chemicals," he added.

PFAS contamination in Warminster, Warrington and Horsham has been linked to firefighting foams used in nearby active and former military bases, but the chemicals went into many industrial, commercial and retail products over the years.

The EPA set a health advisory limit of 70 parts per trillion of PFOS in drinking water in 2016 after the chemicals were included in its Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule (UCMR) program.

More than 80,000 unregulated chemicals exist, and the UCMR program routinely adds about 30 chemicals at a time to a list every U.S. water supplier with more than 10,000 customers must test for at least once.

The chemicals were added to the program list in 2013 after concerns over health effects and the prevalence of the chemicals arose in the 2000s.

As previously reported, EPA administrator Andrew Wheeler visited Philadelphia earlier this year to detail the agency's "PFAS Action Plan," which included a commitment to announce whether it will pursue the creation of a federal drinking water standard for the chemicals by the end of the year. Wheeler added he had "every intention" of ultimately setting a drinking water standard.

But advocates and even EPA officials have said that process could take years to complete. A pair of environmental groups hailed Boyle's bill, called the Protect Drinking Water from PFAS Act of 2019, as addressing some of the uncertainty.

Boyle's legislation does not propose a standard for the contaminants — that's the duty of the EPA —but it would start a deadline for the federal agency to meet.

The next step for Boyle's legislation, H.R. 2377, would also need to pass a Senate vote before moving to the president's desk to sign or veto.