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MAR 27 2019

HORSHAM WATER AND  
SEWER AUTHORITY

## State gives Warminster, Warrington \$8M to tackle chemical contamination costs

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Posted Mar 26, 2019 at 4:00 PM

Gov. Wolf's office announced Tuesday Warminster would get \$5 million and Warrington \$3 million to help pay for PFAS filtration costs.

A pair of Bucks County water authorities are receiving a combined \$8 million in state funding to address chemical contamination in their water supply wells, Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf's office announced Tuesday morning.

The Warminster Municipal Authority, which serves about 40,000 people, will receive \$5 million in funding, while the Warrington Township Water & Sewer Department, which serves about 21,000 people, will receive \$3 million through the Commonwealth Financing Authority's H2O PA Program. That program, created in 2008, provides for "single-year or multi-year grants to municipalities or municipal authorities to assist with the construction of drinking water, sanitary sewer and storm sewer projects," according to the state website.

The disbursements are meant to help Warminster and Warrington defray ongoing costs of filtering per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, after the toxic chemicals were discovered in nationally high amounts in their water wells between 2014 and 2016.

"Access to safe drinking water is one of the fundamental rights of every Pennsylvanian," Wolf said in a prepared statement. "This funding will provide clean and safe water for residents, and will help ensure the public health of these communities in Bucks County in the years ahead."

The PFAS chemicals originated in firefighting foams used at the former Naval Air Warfare Center Warminster, former Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Willow Grove and Horsham Air Guard Station. The military has taken responsibility for the contamination, and has agreed to spend more than \$40 million to provide carbon filtration for more than a dozen impacted public water wells in Warminster, Warrington and Horsham.

The military is using a 70 parts per trillion (ppt) safety threshold for the chemicals, the amount recommended by an Environmental Protection Agency advisory. However, some health experts and state regulators say the level is too high to be fully protective of public health, particularly in the trio of affected Bucks and Montgomery county communities, where residents could potentially have been exposed to the chemicals for decades before they were discovered. Blood testing conducted by the Pennsylvania Department of Health last year confirmed residents had PFAS chemicals in their blood at up to six times the national average.

Responding to the concerns, the water authorities serving each town enacted zero tolerance plans, removing the chemicals below detectable levels, typically about 2 to 5 ppt. But the military declined to pay, leaving the utilities and their ratepayers on the hook for millions of dollars in additional annual costs to install additional treatment systems and purchase clean water from neighboring suppliers.

According to Tuesday's news release, Warminster had 13 total wells impacted by PFAS.

"This project will install treatment systems that will allow the wells to be placed back in service as a water supply source," the release said.

In an email, Tim Hagey, general manager of the Warminster authority, thanked Wolf.

"We are grateful to be able to purchase and install treatment systems with the financial help from the H2O PA grant," Hagey said.

Warrington will use the money to equip four impacted wells with ion exchange and granular activated carbon treatment to help reach the non-detect level, according to Wolf's office.

"We are very excited that we received this grant for this very important project," Warrington water director Christian Jones wrote in an email. "This was all made possible through the hard work and efforts of former Representative Kathy Watson, former Representative Bernie O'Neill, Governor Tom Wolf, and the Warrington Township Board of Supervisors."

Asked if the grant could have any impact on the Warrington's water rates, Jones said it would not for 2019, and that it was "too soon" to say for 2020, although the township will be reviewing the possibility as it calculates rates. Hagey said it was also too soon to tell for Warminster customers until more details are borne out, but that the authority was working to get approval from the state to install new resin treatment for PFAS.

"If approved, we can use the H2O PA grant to purchase and install cost effective treatment," Hagey wrote. "Lowering treatment costs always helps customer's rates."

State officials said Horsham was not included in the program because the township already secured \$10 million from a state PENNVEST grant to deal with filtration costs. That money arrived in 2016 through the efforts of state Rep. Todd Stephens, R-151, of Horsham.

Wolf's office also said Tuesday it would continue other efforts on PFAS. It noted it launched a multi-agency PFAS Action Team last September. The state Department of Environmental Protection also announced earlier this year plans to create a state drinking water standard for PFAS, which legal experts say could give regulators and municipalities additional legal tools to seek cleanup or reimbursement.

"The Action Team will be continuing to pursue solutions to addressing existing contamination and preventing new contamination," DEP secretary Patrick McDonnell said in a prepared statement.

Wolf's office also plugged Restore Pennsylvania, a \$4.5 billion executive proposal for infrastructure projects around the state, as a potential resource for additional PFAS funding.

"While programs like H2O PA and the Hazardous Sites Cleanup program can help provide relief to some cases of PFAS contamination, additional resources are needed to combat the problem comprehensively across Pennsylvania," his office said.

However, the Restore Pennsylvania plan aims to receive funding through the implementation of a severance tax on natural gas drilling in the state, a politically controversial proposal that has failed to come to fruition in Harrisburg since the Marcellus Shale boom began a decade ago.