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HORSHAM WATER AND
SEWER AUTHORITY

Local water providers apply for millions in PFAS grants

By Chris Ullery

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Five grant applications have been submitted to the recently formed Military Installation Remediation and Infrastructure Authority, a group created through legislation from state Rep. Todd Stephens, of Horsham.

Five area water providers could see more than \$9.5 million in state grants to reimburse residents shouldering the costs for a clean water supply.

The Military Installation Remediation and Infrastructure Authority announced last week the applications represent the first major milestone to repay ratepayers rocked by widespread contamination of unregulated chemicals known as PFAS.

“These applications are the first step in reimbursing water customers for the surcharges and fees they paid to address PFAS in drinking water in Horsham, Warrington and Warminster,” state Rep Todd Stephens, R-151, said last week.

The lawmaker and Horsham resident introduced the bill near the end of last year that created the authority as Act 101 of 2019.

A lifetime health advisory limit of 70 parts per trillion for PFAS was established by the Environmental Protection Agency in May 2016, leading to dozens of public drinking water wells being taken offline.

Decades of use of firefighting foams containing the chemicals at former and active military bases in the area are believed to be the source of contamination reaching several hundred parts per trillion in some wells.

Local, state and federal officials have been working toward a settlement with the military to ultimately pay for remediation efforts, but residents have been paying the upfront costs for years.

The most common cost has been higher water rates as residents in the three towns wanted drinking water from a source with no detectable PFAS levels, not just under the EPA's 70 ppt limit.

The grant money can also be used to cover other costs like installing new filtration systems and connection costs from public well owners who had to connect to public water supplies due to contamination.

Connecting to North Wales Water Authority's surface water source was the most common option for the affected towns.

The Warminster Municipal Authority and the Horsham Water and Sewer Authority connected to North Wales water to meet the non-detect needs from ratepayers.

Both Warminster and Horsham have applied for \$2.5 million and \$3.3 million, respectively, to pay back the costs of those new connections.

North Wales acquired Warrington's water department last year and is seeking \$3.7 million to reimburse surcharges accrued by the township's ratepayers.

About half of Warrington's public water was supplied by North Wales before the contamination, and the township connected its remaining water system to the authority after 2016.

The funding for the Military Installation Remediation and Infrastructure Authority is generated on specific parcels for remediation costs associated with military installations.

The former Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Willow Grove, properties with development rights impacted by the base and up to 100 acres of other Horsham Township parcels could be part of those designated parcels.

The Ambler Borough Water Department has also applied for \$270,000 to connect two wells to a "PFAS remediation system," a MIRIA news release states.