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PFAS bill would require Army Corps of Engineers test own sites

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The U.S. House bill would lead to widespread testing for PFAS at projects involving the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, a massive testing endeavor to learn more about the unregulated chemical that has closed many drinking water wells in Bucks and Montgomery counties.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers might soon need to test all federal drinking water projects for the same perfluorinated chemicals at the center of mass water contamination in Bucks and Montgomery counties.

A bipartisan bill introduced by Congressmen Brian Fitzpatrick, R-1, of Middletown, and Antonio Delgado, D-19, of New York, last week puts the onus on the corps to determine if PFAS contamination is present at "any of their facilities or operating sites."

The unregulated chemicals used in firefighting foams at nearby military bases led to many public and private drinking water wells in Warminster, Warrington and Horsham to shutter beginning in May 2016.

"PFAS chemical contamination can lead to serious health issues, and we must act with an urgency that matches the scale of the problem," Fitzpatrick said in a news release last week.

The chemicals were a ubiquitous part of industrial, commercial and retail products for decades in the U.S., but has since been linked to several health problems, including testicular and kidney cancer, high cholesterol and thyroid disease.

"The more we learn about these chemicals, the clearer the danger becomes. That is why the American people deserve to know where these toxins are used," Fitzpatrick added.

Wells in Bucks and Montgomery counties were among the most contaminated sites tested in the country four years ago, with some having nearly 100 times more than the EPA's 70 ppt limit.

Elected officials at every level of government have been negotiating with the military to ultimately repay local residents all of the costs incurred to get clean drinking water since 2016.

The military has agreed to pay for clean-up efforts for wells testing over the EPA limit, but not for the added steps towns have taken to get drinking water with no detectable levels of the suspected carcinogen.

Costs for residents have included higher water rates, paying for private filtration systems and other remediation efforts.

A news release from Fitzpatrick and Delgado states the bill would require the corps to test its sites for PFAS, "identify the contaminants and provide their plan to clean up contaminated sites."

The release adds the bill would keep the corps "involved in regulatory processes at the federal level involving PFAS" and provide "more definitive information" on PFAS contamination nationwide.

The EPA added PFAS to its Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule first in 2013, which required many public water suppliers to test for the contaminant.

Although the UCMR testing can cover many drinking water sources in the country, Delgado said the corps has the capacity to tackle a massive testing endeavor like the one proposed.

"The (corps) has the expertise to support water development projects across the country, and track PFAS contamination at these sites."