

# The Intelligencer

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## Pentagon to create PFAS task force

By Staff and wire reports

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HORSHAM WATER AND  
SEWER AUTHORITY

In one of his first official acts, Defense Secretary Mark Esper ordered the creation of a Pentagon task force to address health and other problems associated with PFAS chemicals at military bases throughout the country, including in Bucks and Montgomery counties.

WASHINGTON — In one of his first official acts, the newly installed defense secretary on Wednesday ordered the creation of a Pentagon task force to address health and other problems associated with dangerous contaminants at more than 400 military installations.

Mark Esper said he will take an “aggressive and holist” approach to the effects of the compounds known as PFAS, including cleanup.

Formally called perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances, PFAS are found in firefighting foam used at military bases and are in a wide range of nonstick and stain-resistant consumer products. First made after World War II, the compounds have been called “forever chemicals” because they are expected to take hundreds or thousands of years to break up. Federal authorities say the compounds appear linked to certain cancers and other health and developmental problems.

The chemicals have been found in nationally high levels in the drinking water in Horsham, Warminster and Warrington, and linked to a trio of current and former military bases in the region.

The military is investigating PFAS at hundreds of additional bases across the country, finding drinking water contamination at more than 50 sites so far. The DOD has prioritized cutting off drinking water exposures above a 70 part per

trillion (ppt) health advisory level developed by the EPA and studying the extent of environmental contamination, but has otherwise made piecemeal efforts to contain or cleanup the chemicals.

“That’s great that they’re making it a priority,” said Joanne Stanton, a Warminster native and co-founder of the BuxMont Coalition for Safer Water. “There’s so many states taking the lead and setting (drinking water standards) in the absence of federal regulations, so I think they see now how important it is to people and residents in affected areas.

“I hope we get a concrete action plan that actually accomplishes something. I hope it’s not just a dog and pony show.”

PFAS initiatives are included in both the House and Senate versions of the National Defense Authorization Act, including funding for health studies, the phase out of PFAS-containing firefighting foams on military bases and a requirement the military adhere to state clean-up standards. A final version of the bill has yet to be approved.

Esper, who previously served as the Army’s top civilian official, was confirmed by the Senate and sworn at the White House on Tuesday, ending a seven-month absence of a confirmed defense secretary.

During his confirmation hearings, U.S. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, of New Hampshire, pressed Esper to act on PFAS contamination.

“EWG applauds Sen. Shaheen for getting Sec. Esper to commit to a comprehensive and aggressive plan to clean up PFAS at military bases,” said Environmental Working Group Senior Vice President for Government Affairs Scott Faber, in a statement. “And we thank Sec. Esper for his swift decision to create this much-needed task force.”