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## EPA to kick the can on PFAS drinking water standard

By Kyle Bagenstose

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The EPA will announce a PFAS Action Plan in Philadelphia on Thursday. Sources say it has not committed to setting a formal drinking water standard.

After much anticipation, the Environmental Protection Agency will kick the can on whether or not to set a federal drinking water standard for PFAS chemicals during a press conference in Philadelphia Thursday morning, according to several sources briefed on the matter.

The agency has been under increasing pressure from environmental groups, lawmakers and impacted communities to set a formal drinking water limit under the Safe Drinking Water Act for the chemicals, also known as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances. That led to an announcement Wednesday that the EPA will unveil a much-anticipated "Action Plan" on toxic PFAS chemicals Thursday morning. The plan will be unveiled at the EPA Region 3 headquarters in Philadelphia during a 9 a.m. news conference, which will be attended by EPA acting administrator Andrew Wheeler and regional administrator Cosmo Servidio, also a Buckingham resident.

Since the middle of last year, the EPA has made addressing PFAS a top priority.

In May, the agency hosted a Nationwide Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C., before embarking on a nationwide tour of impacted regions, which included a July stop in Horsham. That township is one of several area communities heavily impacted by PFAS contamination from current and former military bases. Focus has primarily been placed on perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS), and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), the two most studied PFAS chemicals.

Officials from EPA promoted that four items would be considered as part of an action plan: "evaluating" the need for a federal drinking water standard for PFOS and PFOA; considering adding the chemicals to a federal list of hazardous substances; developing "groundwater cleanup recommendations" for the chemicals; and evaluating the toxicity of lesser known PFAS chemicals.

But the release of the action plan was delayed into 2019 and has been fraught with controversy. A recent Politico report cited sources familiar with deliberations as saying the EPA would not set formal drinking water standards, and an earlier report from that outlet said groundwater cleanup recommendations had stalled during White House review.

Activists and lawmakers have increasingly pressured the EPA to set a formal drinking water standard as the action plan announcement neared and Wheeler faced confirmation hearings in the Senate. Local U.S. Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick, R-1, of Middletown; Brendan Boyle, D-2, of Philadelphia; and Madeleine Dean, D-4, of Abington, recently authored an op-ed in this paper saying the Senate should not confirm Wheeler as EPA administrator unless he commits to setting a drinking water standard.

The EPA's press office pushed back on the Politico reporting, saying no decision had yet been made. Its announcement of the Thursday press conference also included language that seemed to suggest the agency might act on a drinking water standard.

"EPA's Action Plan will move forward with the (drinking water standard) process outlined in the Safe Drinking Water Act for PFOA and PFOS," the release stated, adding it would also "Continue our enforcement actions and clarify our clean up strategies, expand monitoring of PFAS in the environment, and enhance our research and scientific foundation for addressing PFAS."

But sources who took part in a private, national conference call the EPA hosted Wednesday afternoon said the EPA has not formally committed to setting a standard. Instead, they said the EPA only committed to making a "determination" of whether to set a standard by the end of the year, essentially kicking the can on a decision. If the agency did commit to creating a standard at that point, it would likely take additional years to actually go through the process of creating one.

Sources, who requested anonymity to reveal details of the call ahead of public announcements, said the EPA did commit to listing PFOS and PFOA on a list of hazardous substances under the federal Superfund law. The listing is expected to add more teeth to communities dealing with contamination, and those on the call said the EPA also gave that assurance.

The EPA will also add PFAS to an upcoming unregulated contaminant monitoring program, in which the EPA will test water utilities nationwide for the presence of the chemicals. The EPA already did such testing years ago for PFOS and PFOA, and it was unclear which chemicals would be included in the new program, although one source said it would involve updated and more precise testing than the prior program.

The EPA would also develop a number of "toolkits" for use by impacted states and communities, including materials to assess human health impacts, identify potential sources of PFAS exposure, and the creation of a "toolbox" for municipalities.

An EPA spokeswoman asked for comment Wednesday evening responded by repeating the statements already made in the agency's announcement of the Thursday press conference.

Additional details on the EPA's plan are expected to be released at the conference. The event is open to the public and will be held at 1650 Arch St., Philadelphia. It will also be livestreamed at [www.epa.gov/live](http://www.epa.gov/live).