

## Protect Wisconsin from PFAS

Posted on Jan 12, Posted by [Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31](#) Category [Wisconsin](#)



***Sen. Smith writes about how chemicals known as Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) are impacting our groundwater. We know that testing is essential to identify PFAS contamination, understand the extent of the issue and act to limit exposure to these harmful chemicals.***

---

BRUNSWICK, WI - Protecting the quality of food we eat, air we breathe and water we drink should be a top priority. It's what we need to survive.

We've seen over time that inadvertent mistakes have been made that threaten access to these essential resources. In some cases, corporate greed poses short-term profits for some and long-term health impacts for all. Without the proper research and intervention, we can face serious consequences for decades—and generations—to come.

Sometimes neither business nor government leaders are aware of environmental dangers for years until patterns of illness or death appear. An example I often reflect on is the near extinction of the American bald eagle. For decades, environmentalists were puzzled at the eagle populations' rapid decline. Then researchers discovered the correlation between the

widely-used chemical DDT as a mosquito pesticide and eagles' endangerment.

At the peak of the problem it was rare to even spot an eagle; I know, because I was a child when this was happening and got excited any time I saw one of these majestic birds flying overhead. Since Congress banned DDT in 1972, the resurgence of the eagle is one of the most amazing environmental success stories of the last several decades.

This is what's currently happening with Wisconsin's groundwater because of chemicals known as Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS). PFAS are also referred to as "forever chemicals" because they don't break down naturally in the environment and can stay in one's body for long periods of time. These chemicals produced in laboratories are used in products like food wrap, stain resistant carpeting, non-stick pans and water repellant clothing. PFAS are dangerous because they're in so many products and they're hazardous to humans, having been linked to certain cancers, liver damage, decrease in vaccine efficacy and more.

One product specifically highlights the widespread threat of PFAS: firefighting foam. As effective as the foam is in controlling a fire, it was found to be just as effective at contaminating our groundwater. After a fire incident, the foam was just washed off a road or airport runway entering into the ground. Eventually it was bound to end up in the groundwater. With approximately 97% of Wisconsin communities (equaling 70% of the state's population) dependent on groundwater for their water supply, this really is an alarming situation that we cannot ignore. It won't go away on its own.

Groundwater testing is essential to identify PFAS contamination, understand the extent of the issue and act to limit exposure to these harmful chemicals. Some communities have tested and found their wells to be contaminated; they've started taking action.



PFAS are a group of man-made chemicals that are used in a wide variety of products, including food packaging, firefighting foams, and industrial coatings. They are persistent in the environment and can accumulate in the body, leading to a variety of health problems. PFAS are also known to be toxic to wildlife and can contaminate water and soil. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is working to reduce the use of PFAS in state-owned products and is also monitoring PFAS levels in the environment. The DNR is also working to educate the public about the risks of PFAS and how to avoid them.