Message

From: Kazempoor, Kelly [kazempoor.kelly@epa.gov]
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POLITICO Pro: NIFA officials pitted against each other
Forbes: Study: Fertilizer Industry Emits 100 Times More Methane Than Thought
HuffPost: Here's Everything We Know About The 'Forever Chemicals' In Food
Michigan Radio: Environmental group: EPA not doing enough about PFAS
Business Insider: The US just banned 12 pesticides that are like nicotine for bees. Here's how dangerous they are.
Truthout: Trump's EPA Is Letting "Forever Chemicals" Into Our Food, Experts Say

POLITICO Pro
NIFA officials pitted against each other
https://subscriber.politicopro.com/newsletters/morning-agriculture/2019/06/nifa-officials-pitted-against-each-other-646366
By HELENA BOTTEMILLER EVICH

ADMINISTRATION LAUNCHES REVIEW OF PESTICIDE, ENDANGERED SPECIES PROCESS: An interagency working group tasked with improving how the government evaluates the impact of pesticides on endangered species and their habitat held its first official meeting on Thursday. Top officials from the departments of Interior, Commerce, USDA, EPA and the Council on Environmental Quality have convened informally for years, but the 2018 farm bill codified the process and requested that regular updates be sent to Congress.

Fix is needed: EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler, who leads the working group, described as "broken" the government's consultation process for ensuring approved pesticide uses and other federal actions don't jeopardize endangered species. He noted the agency has more than 600 pesticide registrations to review by 2022 and said the workload will be a challenge without a more timely and transparent consultation process that can withstand legal challenges.

How it works: Most pesticides used by the agriculture industry must be registered with EPA before they can be used; the agency by law must review them every 15 years. As part of that process, EPA works with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or National Marine Fisheries Service to minimize harmful effects on threatened and endangered species.

But if harm can't be avoided, the agencies prepare a lengthy biological opinion to determine whether a pesticide is likely to "jeopardize the continued existence" of certain species. Such opinions are rarely conducted.

The complex consultation process has long been bogged down. A number of factors contribute to the problem, including disagreement among federal agencies over what research and data to use when evaluating pesticides; litigation by environmental groups; and the agriculture and pesticide industries' political influence in Congress and at federal agencies.

Back in 2017, top political appointees at the Interior Department, including Secretary David Bernhardt, who was then serving as deputy secretary, blocked the Fish and Wildlife Service from publishing a biological opinion on three widely used pesticides and also started a process to apply a more narrow standard for determining risks, The New York Times reported.

That opinion had found that two of the pesticides — malathion and chlorpyrifos — were so toxic that they jeopardized the existence of more than 1,200 endangered birds, fish and other animals. The interagency working group is expected to develop a new standard for determining risks.

Forbes
Study: Fertilizer Industry Emits 100 Times More Methane Than Thought
https://www.forbes.com/sites/lisettevoytko/2019/06/07/study-fertilizer-industry-emits-100-times-more-methane-than-thought/#5878545946d9
Lisette Voytko

Topline: Joint research from Cornell and the Environmental Defense Fund found that methane emissions from the U.S. fertilizer industry are 100 times higher than previously thought, and surpass Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates for all industrial processes in the country, suggesting EPA estimates for the climate-affecting gas may be woefully inaccurate.

Using a Google Street View car equipped with a high-precision methane sensor, researchers drove the car on public roads near six fertilizer plants to measure their emissions, according to Cornell University.
The study reveals a large disparity between EPA estimates and actual emissions levels.
Why is methane bad? Methane is the majority compound in natural gas, and according to study co-author John Albertson, it "has a stronger global warming potential than carbon dioxide." Joseph Rudek, another author on the study, agreed. "In a 20-year timeframe, methane's global warming potential is 84 times that of carbon dioxide," he said.

How is fertilizer creating so much methane? The fertilizer industry uses methane to fuel its operations and as an ingredient in its products. In addition to its heavy use of the gas, researchers believe additional, unintended emissions are caused by partial chemical reactions during production and other mishaps.

What can be done? Researchers say mobile sensors can test for all kinds of emissions. According to Cornell, it's an economical and fast way to detect and then mitigate increased emissions. "Pollution in the air doesn't respect property boundaries, so even if you don't have access to private land, the current revolution in sensor technologies allows us a lens into the degree of cleanliness of a factory," said Albertson.

HuffPost
Here's Everything We Know About The 'Forever Chemicals' In Food
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/forever-chemicals-food-pfas_l_5cfa7d79e4b0c7edd0b6591e?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAL9qzDQO81D70rreheYLHI1YV0f_96ajX-8wT0ajks0i2Vs46cylv3X37dV-aOcrD879xc_EFGuL9V3EHSxzjgevKFPBQilq17FGYawjrUoL66wgxuesbWB2zDc_8JJfHA61FKIcam0CPjou5LGTqRr-RQIIIxqBi4B0tJZ3-sag
By Jamie Feldman

You may not have been aware of the substances perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl prior to this week when leaked Food and Drug Administration documents revealed that both had been detected in foods like meat, dairy, poultry and even store-bought chocolate cake.

Known as PFAS, these chemicals are found in items like food packaging, non-stick cookware and firefighter foam, and when found in concentrations, exposure to the substances is linked to testicular and kidney cancer, thyroid disease and high cholesterol.

PFAS are hardly a new phenomenon, with the Environmental Protection Agency having been aware of the risk for at least two decades. But as of late, the focus surrounding what's been dubbed as "forever chemicals" has revolved around

drinking water. Forever chemicals have infiltrated water across 43 states nationwide, impacting the drinking supply of about 19 million Americans.

With the news that they're also being found in our food supply, things get even more complicated. But how much do we need to worry, and what can we do to control our intake?

Just how 'forever' are these forever chemicals?
PFAS don't break down in the environment and take an incredibly long amount of time they take to leave the body. David Andrews, a Ph.D. toxicologist and senior scientist at the Environmental Working Group, explained how they earned the nickname "forever chemicals."

"The half-life of PFAS is on the order of four to five years on average," he said. "That means if you ingested some today, in four or five years only half that amount would be gone. They're also called forever chemicals because they don't break down in the environment."

"When the Environmental Protection Agency drafted its lifetime advisory for PFAS as well as in New Jersey and internationally, it expected food to be the major exposure for people," he said. "So it gets at this bigger question of expanding beyond drinking water — what do we need to do to reduce or eliminate exposure as much as possible?"

How can I prevent my exposure to PFAS in food?
Unfortunately, because of the grand nature of the issue and the lack of research pinpointing how exactly the PFAS are infiltrating the food system, there's not a whole lot we as consumers can do to prevent exposure.

"Based on what we know about food, there's not much a consumer can do to change exposure in any meaningful way," Andrews said. "At this point, it's focusing on water and pushing for the FDA and the government to do a better job evaluating it. It's a job that goes beyond one person, and simply changes can't eliminate the exposure from food. You should be concerned, but realize a lot of this is outside of your hands. That's part of the reason we've focused on federal standards because in this case, it's really outside your hands based on how little we know."

It's a discouraging analysis, and one that Andrews says reflects both our current anti-regulatory administration, as well as extremely lax regulation of industrial use chemicals — but it's not all bad news. Andrews shared at least one source of PFAS you can take action in staying away from.

Are there any foods particularly high in PFAS?
"Microwave popcorn has traditionally been a very high source of exposure, we've recommended not using it for at least a decade because of the frequent use of PFAs on the paper coating as well as the ability to leak into the food." Andrews said. "I was also part of a study three years ago that tested fast-food wrappers, we found 50 percent of those, pretty much from every fast-food chain in the country, including pastry wrappers from coffee shops were coated in PFAS chemicals."

The chemicals are added to food to create grease resistance, but Andrews said there are other options to achieve the same goal. "I know fast-food chains are looking into moving out of this completely, but I don't know where exactly that stands currently," he said.

Andrews also said that complete elimination is not possible, there is proof that a significant decrease is.

"We can take very important steps that will drastically reduce the levels in people," he said. "On the positive side, we have seen a decrease in the last decade of concentration of PFAS in our blood based on a voluntary phase-out agreement that the manufacturers entered with the EPA. We have seen that changes in the chemical marketplace do lead to changes in the general population and how much they're exposed. We've also learned more about how potent these chemicals are and how much more needs to be done. But change absolutely can happen, and it can happen in our lifetime."

Michigan Radio
Environmental group: EPA not doing enough about PFAS
https://www.michiganradio.org/post/environmental-group-epa-not-doing-enough-about-pfas
By ZARIA PHILLIPS

Following the recent discovery of chemicals known as PFAS in some kinds of food, the Environmental Working Group says the Environmental Protection Agency is not doing enough to deal with PFAS contamination.

Earlier this year, the EPA announced it's moving forward with what it calls an action plan. It could potentially set drinking water standards for two kinds of the chemicals.

The EPA is not acting quickly enough with its plan, said Scott Faber, senior vice president of government affairs at the Environmental Working Group.

“The action plan and this update on the action plan is really a plan to plan and not a plan to act,” he said.

David Andrews, senior scientist for the EWG, says new research suggests safe levels of PFAS exposure are much lower than previously thought.

“The PFAS contamination of food is likely coming from air emissions, contaminated water, and contaminated sludge or biosolids,” he said. “The FDA should collect much more information on food contaminated with PFAS because at this point it is not really possible to know which types of foods or from which locations pose the greatest risks.”

“Any additional exposure to PFAS chemicals is a human health concern," said Andrews. "People need to reduce their exposure to these toxic chemicals any way they can."

Andrews said the EPA is not treating this issue as a crisis.

“The agency has shown no urgency to address the PFAS crisis and Americans are no closer to being protected from PFAS chemicals than they were a year ago.”

Business Insider
The US just banned 12 pesticides that are like nicotine for bees. Here's how dangerous they are.
https://www.businessinsider.com/epa-banned-pesticides-killing-bees-2019-5
Aria Bendix

Give a bee neonicotinoids, and it can become addicted.

The pesticide, whose name literally means "nicotine-like," has been used commercially since the 1980s as a way to protect crops from being destroyed by insects. But it was never meant to hurt bees, which are vital to producing crops such as fruits, vegetables, and almonds.

In bees, the effects of neonicotinoids are similar to those of nicotine in humans. Not only is the pesticide detrimental to their health, but bees also tend to prefer it to their own food source. Bees that are exposed to neonicotinoids can experience problems with their central nervous systems, often resulting in impaired memory, movement, and even death.

For years, beekeepers have warned that the pesticides are killing their hives. Any major decline in honeybee numbers could have severe implications for the human diet, since bees pollinate about a third of the world's crops.

Recently, concerns about this threat translated into action in the US.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has announced a ban on 12 neonicotinoid pesticides from three agro-chemical companies: Syngenta, Valent, and Bayer. Seven of these pesticides are used as a protective coating for crops like soybeans, cotton, and corn.

When farmers use neonicotinoids on their crops, the pesticides can leech into water supplies, which then get absorbed by flowers that serve as vital food sources for bees. In 2017, beekeepers in the US reported losing about 40% of their hives — a trend that has continued in years since.

Truthout
Trump's EPA Is Letting "Forever Chemicals" Into Our Food, Experts Say
https://truthout.org/articles/trumps-epa-is-letting-forever-chemicals-into-our-food-experts-say/
By Mike Ludwig

growing chorus of environmental groups and public health experts are slamming the Trump administration for its milquetoast response to the widespread problem of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), a family of toxic "forever chemicals" that are linked to serious diseases and have contaminated food products and drinking water across the country.

Earlier this week, environmental groups released photos of previously unreleased research by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) showing the presence of 16 PFAS chemicals in food products sampled from eight mid-Atlantic states, including seafood, meat, dairy products, various vegetables and pre-packaged chocolate cake. Exposure to PFAS chemicals is associated with a variety of health problems, including cancer, changes in cholesterol levels, damage to the immune system, hormone disruption, congenital disabilities, and liver and kidney disease, according to the Environmental Working Group.

While the FDA said in a statement this week that identifying levels and human health effects from dietary PFAS exposure is an "emerging area of science" and pledged to continue research and testing, public health watchdogs said the previously unreleased FDA findings are evidence that the government must take swift action to limit human exposure to the dangerous chemicals immediately.

So far, they said, the Trump administration's response to the PFAS crisis, which includes an "action plan" currently proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), has not gone far enough to protect public health. The plan only focuses two chemicals in the PFAS family, which includes thousands of compounds, and the agency has not moved swiftly enough to propose new regulations that will keep PFAS chemicals out of food and drinking water while holding the companies that use and make them accountable.

"To say that this EPA plan is abysmal would be too kind," said Kyla Bennett, the science policy director at Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), a group which represents federal environmental scientists and other experts, and a former attorney and scientist formerly with EPA, in a statement on Thursday. "Under its current leadership, EPA appears incapable of fulfilling its mission of protecting the public from emerging health threats."

PFAS chemicals have contaminated drinking water in communities across the country, notably near industrial facilities that produce or use the chemicals as well as U.S. Air Force bases, where PFAS has long been used in a firefighting foam applied to runways. Public health experts said the FDA data is further evidence that food is another major site of PFAS exposure for consumers, as scientists have long suspected.

David Andrews, a toxicologist and senior scientist at EWG, said a multitude of studies have shown that PFAS can be a danger to human health even in small concentrations, and the chemicals are persistent – they do not break down in the environment. Trace amounts can now be found in nearly everyone's body in the United States.

"It's the potent toxicity of these PFAS chemicals that make it a big deal when they are detected in food and drinking water," Andrews told reporters on Thursday. "The results from the FDA clearly indicate that some food products are more contaminated than others, and ultimately more testing needs to be [done to] better understand contamination of our food supply and identify where these high sources of exposure are coming from, and take action to clean up our food."

There are thousands of chemicals in the PFAS class that have been used in a variety of ways for decades. While the FDA has banned some PFAS chemicals from food packaging, others are still allowed. Andrews and other experts said that when a chemical is prohibited or controlled by the government, companies can use a "loophole" in federal law to use other PFAS chemicals in the same family in food packaging without alerting the FDA, as long as their own scientists determine that the chemicals are safe.

Other PFAS chemicals, such as the PFOS, a chemical formerly used to make Teflon for non-stick pans and currently under a federal health advisory, are persistent in the environment and can enter the food supply in a variety of ways. These include water contamination as well as sewer sludge, millions of pounds of which are applied to farm fields as a soil enhancer and fertilizer.

About half the meat and seafood products tested by the FDA came up positive for PFOS. In North Carolina, leafy green vegetables gathered from a river contaminated by a PFAS manufacturer showed high levels of contamination in either their roots or leaves and fruit, depending on the chemical makeup of the PFAS compound, according to the FDA. In New Mexico, products from a dairy farm near a contaminated Air Force base showed elevated levels on PFAS.

About half the meat and seafood products tested by the FDA came up positive for PFOS.
Jamie C. DeWitt, a pharmacology and toxicology professor at Eastern Carolina State University, said studies of people who became ill living near sites of major industrial PFAS contamination clearly show that diseases resulting from exposure can be life threatening, and scientists are currently working to determine what levels of exposure to different PFAS compounds carry risks of cancer and other diseases.

"It's time to take action to restrict people's exposure so that risk can be reduced," Dewitt told reporters on Thursday.

Scott Faber, EWG's vice president of governmental affairs, said there are a number of bipartisan initiatives to address PFAS contamination in Congress, because the problem is widespread and impacts every congressional district across the U.S.

"Frankly I have never seen a time when there has been such a bipartisan commitment to addressing such an environmental challenge," Faber said.

Faber said there is a sharp contrast between Congress and the EPA, where regulators working for Trump appointees have yet to take advantage of their authority under federal law to detect, contain and clean up PFAS contamination. No deadlines have been set to test for PFAS chemicals in sewer sludge added to farm fields, and the EPA has not moved to place tough limits on PFAS releases into the environment. In fact, the EPA does not list PFAS as "hazardous" or and doesn't include it in a federal registry for toxic chemical releases.

"No administration has employed more chemical industry lobbyists than the Trump administration, so it should not be surprising that the EPA has failed to take even one step toward addressing the PFAS crisis," Faber said.

The proposed protective standards for PFAS cleanup are not tough enough, and chemical companies that are responsible for the problem are let off the hook.
The EPA's draft "action plan" only covers the two PFAS chemicals under a public health advisory — PFOS and PFOA. There are 4,000 chemicals in the PFAS family that have yet to be closely studied for health impacts. While the EPA has issued an advisory about PFOS and PFOA, the amount of other PFAS chemicals used in food packaging, non-stick cookware and industrial treatments has skyrocketed, according to PEER. Also, the current draft plan only covers PFAS contamination in groundwater, but lakes, rivers and reservoirs supply drinking water for a majority of the U.S.

population. The proposed protective standards for PFAS cleanup are not tough enough, PEER argues, and chemical companies that are responsible for the problem are let off the hook.

PEER is planning a series of legal actions designed to fill "critical gaps" in the EPA action plan.

"Significantly, EPA has no handle on sharply growing PFAS manufacture, importation, storage, and disposal," PEER Executive Director Tim Whitehouse said in a statement on Thursday. "The PFAS crisis is going to get much worse unless there are major course corrections far beyond EPA's terribly timid plan."

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