

Protect our Drinking Water from PFAS “Forever Chemicals”

Because of their widespread use, Per and Polyfluoroalkyl substances or **PFAS** have been found in the drinking water of a growing number of Wisconsin communities. PFAS, a class of thousands of substances —toxic chemicals—are used to make water and stain-resistant products. Even at very low levels, exposure to PFAS has been linked to cancer and other serious health problems in humans, such as reproductive issues, developmental delays, thyroid hormone disruption, high cholesterol, immune deficiencies, and more. In Wisconsin, PFAS contamination is having long-lasting, detrimental effects on human health as well as on wildlife, water, land and air quality. While PFAS continue to pollute our environment, taxpayers are largely shouldering the costs of cleaning up the contamination. Therefore, the use of PFAS should be eliminated; PFAS should be removed from our drinking water; and polluters, not the public, must pay for PFAS cleanup.

PFAS Contamination in West Bend, Wisconsin

Salam/Peace. I'm Huda Alkaff, an ecologist, environmental educator, and the founder and director of Wisconsin Green Muslims. Since June 2022, when West Bend, Wisconsin, began shutting down groundwater wells— the source of drinking water for many residents— due to PFAS contamination, I have been asking myself how we can ensure our water is safe to drink. In the past, the other two source wells have also had elevated PFAS levels. The city did not act quickly when high PFAS levels were discovered in its water; West Bend Water Works discovered unsafe levels of PFAS in January 2020, but did not take action until June 2022. They only did so when the public learned of the troubling test results through a public records request and alerted officials at the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, who pushed the utility to notify the public and shut down a well. In the interim, many residents were unknowingly exposed to PFAS for years.

West Bend is not an exceptional case. PFAS have been detected in over 120 communities across the state, and are impacting millions of communities across the country. As an environmental justice group and working with the #PFASFree Wisconsin campaign and the Great Lakes PFAS Action Network, my organization is collaborating with others to secure our right to know about PFAS in our drinking water, access to affordable testing, robust filtering systems, and stronger safe drinking water standards.



We also ask that polluters, not the communities, pay for PFAS cleanup.

Wisconsin Green Muslims Policy Priorities: PFAS Prevention and Remediation

PROTECT AND SUPPORT PFAS-IMPACTED COMMUNITIES: Ensure communities have access to information, resources, and safe water (e.g., switching community water supplies, providing water filters and bottled water, etc.), at no extra cost, between when PFAS are identified and a more permanent, safer solution is put into place.

PREVENT FUTURE PFAS CONTAMINATION: Prohibit the sale of all PFAS-containing products except when no safer alternative yet exists. Explore and educate about alternatives.

TEST AND MONITOR MORE TO UNDERSTAND OUR FULL EXPOSURE: Expand PFAS monitoring in surface water and groundwater, particularly in rural and urban areas near industrial activity.



Sign to avoid foam containing PFAS on Huron River.

Recommendations

To effectively remediate PFAS in drinking water and prevent future contamination, we recommend federal coordination and action on the following:

EXPAND PFAS MONITORING AND TESTING: Increase monitoring and testing of PFAS in surface water and groundwater, with a focus on rural and urban areas near industrial sites.

MAKE POLLUTERS PAY: Enforce financial responsibility on polluters for PFAS cleanup and community harm under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), ensuring that the polluters cover cleanup costs rather than impacted communities.

IMPLEMENT INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO CLEAN UP EXISTING PFAS CONTAMINATION: Develop disposal methods for PFAS that do not unfairly burden communities. Prohibit those that harm vulnerable people, including a ban on incineration of PFAS waste.

EPA's Proposed PFAS National Primary Drinking Water Regulation (NPDWR)

In March 2023, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed national drinking water standards for six PFAS substances. However, nearly a year later, these standards remain pending final approval from the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The proposed drinking water standards aim to address the PFAS crisis affecting communities nationwide, including those in the Great Lakes region. **We urge the administration to enact strong national drinking water standards for PFAS and protect the health of our communities.**

Additional Resources

- [PFAS in Your Municipal Water System? A Quick Guide for Wisconsin Communities](#)
- [Wisconsin Resource Guide: PFAS in Your Water](#)
- [Great Lakes PFAS Action Network Policy Agenda 2023-2024](#)

About Wisconsin Green Muslims

Formed in 2005, Wisconsin Green Muslims intends to educate the Muslim community and the public about the Islamic environmental justice teachings, to apply these teachings in daily life and to contribute to coalitions and collaborations working toward a just, healthy, peaceful and sustainable future. *Connecting Faith, Environmental Justice, Sustainability, and Healing through Education and Service*. Contact: **Huda Alkaff**, Founder & Director, info@WisconsinGreenMuslims.org

About the WECR Caucus

Wisconsin Green Muslims is a core member of the Water Equity & Climate Resilience (WECR) Caucus. Anchored by PolicyLink, the WECR Caucus is a national network of nearly 70 organizations centering frontline communities of color and low-income communities in working to achieve water equity and climate justice through federal and state policy advocacy, centering the voices and solutions of communities most affected by water challenges and the climate crisis. For more information, contact: **Yasmin Zaerpoor**, Director of Water Equity & Climate Resilience, PolicyLink, yasmin@policylink.org.