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PFAS

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See which US cities report 'forever chemicals' in drinking water

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USA TODAY

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Water pouring from the faucets of at least 42 million Americans is contaminated with unacceptable levels of “forever chemicals,” according to a USA TODAY analysis of records the Environmental Protection Agency released June 2.

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, are a family of chemicals engineered to be nearly indestructible. Studies have shown they can accumulate over time in human bodies, leading to certain cancers and other health complications.

Over the past two years, the EPA has collected complete sets of test results from about 6,900 drinking water systems, and thousands more are expected as the PFAS testing initiative continues another year.

USA TODAY’s analysis of these systems with complete results shows nearly a quarter of large water utilities serving at least 100,000 customers exceeded limits the EPA approved last year on two chemicals: PFOS and PFOA.

Water systems in Fairfax County, Virginia, and San Juan, Puerto Rico – each serving more than 1 million customers – have now joined the list of utilities with test results that averaged over the limits in the EPA’s latest data.

USA TODAY’s analysis also shows that Tempe, Arizona, which provides water to more than 165,000 people, has joined that list. Multiple test locations there failed to

meet the EPA standards. PFOS at one sample site averaged 55 parts per trillion (ppt), several times higher than the acceptable limit of 4 ppt.

MAP: Where water systems reported PFAS contamination

Click on a system in the map below to review its PFAS measurements. You may also enter an address in the search box to locate the nearest water systems. Don't see a map? [Click here](#).

Altogether, USA TODAY found 774 systems don't meet the limits for forever chemicals. Those utilities probably will need to install advanced filtration systems or find other sources of drinking water by 2031.

The deadline for systems to meet the water standards originally was set for 2029, but in May, the EPA proposed an extension and announced it intends to rescind limits on four other types of PFAS set under the Biden administration in 2024.

EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin said the delay was to provide “common-sense flexibility” to “support water systems across the country, including small systems in rural communities, as they work to address these contaminants.”

Industry groups representing water utilities have sued the EPA, claiming the agency did not follow proper procedures when approving PFAS limits last year. Last month, Zeldin said rescinding the limits on the other four forever chemicals would ensure they “follow the legal process laid out in the Safe Drinking Water Act.”

The lawsuit has been on hold since February to allow time for the new administration to review the limits. On June 4, the [hold was extended](#) through July 21 “while the United States determines the most appropriate course of action for this litigation in light of EPA’s decision to reconsider portions of the challenged rule.”

Advocacy organizations have denounced the EPA’s proposed changes on forever chemicals. Melanie Benesh, vice president of government affairs for the

Environmental Working Group, described the move as a “public health betrayal.”

“Communities have waited decades for protection – now the EPA is pulling the rug out,” Benesh said. “Science is clear: PFAS are dangerous even in tiny amounts. The agency must protect all Americans, not just from two chemicals, but from the entire class of harmful PFAS.”