

Republican Legislators Set to Undo Clean Water Policy

Written by Wisconsin Conservation Voters, Ryan Billingham
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Committee to meet Friday expected to suspend the emergency rule to limit toxic exposure of PFAS from firefighting foam.

MADISON – For months, despite inaction, Republican legislators have been making baseless claims of success and bipartisan progress on protecting our drinking water. Now, they are undoing the one small step they took this session, stopping any progress toward protecting our health while handing even more power over to polluting special interests.

The Joint Committee for Review of Administrative Rules (JCRAR), chaired by Sen. Steve Nass, will meet on Friday to suspend the emergency rule adopted by the DNR Board in October that would limit toxic exposure of PFAS from firefighting foam. If legislators are successful, they will undo the sole, miniscule piece of clean water legislation they passed this session.

“Their failure to adopt policies that keep PFAS pollution out of our environment and set standards that protect our children is a public health crisis,” said Jennifer Giegerich, government affairs director. “These emergency rules for firefighting foam were the very least they could – and should – be doing to help protect our friends and neighbors. What message is Chairman Nass sending to people exposed to PFAS who are facing lifelong health problems, when they are willing to suspend even this minimal emergency rule because polluters don’t want to take any responsibility?”

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PFAS chemicals are having a profound impact on our health in Wisconsin and across the country. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control has advised doctors that PFAS chemicals have been linked to increased rates of testicular and kidney cancer. Exposure can also lead to liver lesions, kidney degeneration, and damage to liver function. In addition, a number of large epidemiological studies have related higher maternal exposure of these chemicals to lower birth weight. There is also evidence that PFAS can make vaccines less effective.

These chemicals build up in our environment and our bodies and do not breakdown. Once they are in our water supply, it's extremely difficult to remediate. The toxic firefighting foam was used in military and firefighter training exercises, as well as firefighting activities. Now, the chemicals are showing up in hotspots across the state.

Wisconsin Conservation Voters likened the Republican-led legislature's inaction on safe drinking water to their inaction on COVID-19.

"We know what we need to do to save lives when it comes to COVID-19 and when it comes to toxic chemicals in our drinking water," said Ryan Billingham, communications director. "Based on their inaction this year, these legislators have zero credibility when it comes to protecting public health. Time and again they've chosen to protect their political piggybanks over protecting our lives and the lives of our loved ones."

"We urge the members of JCRAR to let these minimal rules go forward and begin working on the longer range solutions to prevent PFAS pollution that were laid out in the Wisconsin PFAS Action Plan, which was released yesterday," said Giegerich.

The full Wisconsin PFAS Action Plan can be [found here](#).