

Opening Statement of Chairman Rand Paul, M.D.  
Federal Spending Oversight Subcommittee

*The Federal Role in the Toxic PFAS Chemical Crisis*  
9/26/2018

I call this hearing of the Federal Spending Oversight Subcommittee to order.

Today we are here to discuss the issue of PFAS, which is a chemical grouping that includes approximately 3000 individual chemical chains. Two chains in particular, PFOA and PFOS are of issue here today.

By way of background, PFAS were originally developed in the 1940s and are water and temperature resistant, while not electrically conductive. As you can imagine, this made them very attractive for use in firefighting foams.

PFAS applications go well beyond firefighting including as important components in everything from medical scrubs and respirator tubes, non-stick cookware, stain resistant carpet, and computer components.

However, like many things, this once wonder product, has been suggested to be linked to health issues. In humans, high cholesterol is the most common result, but liver complications and even cancer have been found in lower order animals which raised some level of concern.

For that reason, the PFOA and PFOS chains are no longer manufactured in the U.S., Europe, and Japan. However, they are still available for import, much of which come from China. Moreover, PFAS are very stable, meaning they have a basically indefinite shelf life.

Perhaps because of these qualities, the human body doesn't process PAFS well; meaning that if ingested in high enough amount over a long enough time, these chemicals will build up in a person's blood chemistry, perhaps reaching levels that would cause troubling health issues. I should point out, that one has to ingest PFAS; they are not absorbed through contact exposure.

So, why is this of concern to the Federal Spending Oversight subcommittee? Well, PFAS have infiltrated certain water supplies, not so much in my home state of Kentucky, but very much so in the Ranking Member's state of Michigan.

This meaning people are unwittingly being exposed to these chemicals through the very tap water, and the conventional wisdom is that this water infiltration has been caused primarily due to firefighting foams that were allowed to seep into ground water or run off into streams and lakes.

Often this occurred in training exercises, not actual firefighting; and while your local fire department may have had a hand in this, U.S. military bases appear to be a significant contributor to this problem.

There have been some developments. The EPA has issued a health advisory related to PFAS at 70 parts per trillion is further exploring the issue, as are the other federal agencies

represented here today. But, is 70 the right number? Some states have set it much lower, while others have followed the EPA guidelines, which some say are lower than needed. The fact that the appropriate level is being debated begs the question, how were these levels set in the first place?

Some are calling for quick action while others warn moving faster may lead to improper or unneeded regulation. The U.S. military seems to be acting by changing procedures for use of PFAS firefighting foams, including more robust clean ups when it is used and has turned to alternative fire retardants. They have also spent over \$200 million on testing and remediation efforts where contamination has already occurred. More good news is that sampling from the Red Cross and the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, a CDC activity, have shown a dramatic decline in PFOA and PFOS concentrations in blood chemistry over the past two decades. It does not mean all is well, but it appears things are moving in a positive direction.

But the question remains, is this enough, what are the continuing risks, and what will the long term cost to the federal government's be? Hopefully the witnesses we have here today will be able to help us answer these questions.

With that, I'll recognize the Ranking Member Peters who brought this issue to my attention, to give his opening statement.