

May 10, 2022

Re: Relief for Municipal Solid Waste Landfills from CERCLA Liability for PFAS

Dear Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Capito, Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, Chairman Pallone, and Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers:

The municipal solid waste (MSW) management sector strongly supports the goal of addressing per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination and holding accountable manufacturers and heavy users of these compounds. We are concerned, however, that regulation under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) instead would assign environmental cleanup liability to essential public services and their customers. We therefore request that Congress provide MSW landfills and other passive receivers with a narrow exemption from liability if certain PFAS are designated as hazardous substances under CERCLA. Doing so would keep CERCLA liability on the industries that created the pollution in the first place.

Context

- Landfills neither manufacture nor use PFAS; instead, they receive discarded materials containing PFAS that are ubiquitous in residential and commercial waste streams. MSW landfills and the communities they serve should not be held financially liable under CERCLA for PFAS contamination, as landfills are part of the long-term solution to managing these compounds.
- Landfills are essential public services that are subject to extensive federal, state, and local environmental, health, and safety requirements. Further, MSW landfills are important to managing and limiting PFAS in the environment, as recognized by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in its December 2020 draft Interim Guidance on the Destruction and Disposal of [PFAS] and Materials Containing [PFAS].
- **Just as certain airports are required by law to use firefighting foam containing PFAS, permitting authorities often require landfills to accept waste streams containing PFAS.**
- Most landfills rely on wastewater treatment facilities for leachate management. Wastewater and drinking water facilities increasingly rely on landfills for biosolids management and disposal of PFAS-laden filters. Efforts to address PFAS at MSW landfills and drinking water and wastewater facilities must avoid disrupting this interdependence among essential public services to communities.
- Landfill leachate typically represents a minor proportion of the total quantity of PFAS received at wastewater treatment facilities from all sources. PFAS manufacturers or users, by comparison, contribute PFAS at levels that can be orders of magnitude higher than landfills.

Significant Economic Impacts

- Removing PFAS from landfill leachate requires advanced treatment techniques which are prohibitively expensive. Estimated capital costs to implement leachate pretreatment at a moderate-sized landfill to the extent necessary to significantly reduce PFAS range from \$2 million to \$7 million, **with nationwide costs totaling \$966 million to \$6.279 billion per year** for the solid waste sector. Trace concentrations of PFAS nevertheless would remain in leachate following pretreatment, exposing landfills to CERCLA liability.
- Absent relief from CERCLA liability, manufacturers and heavy users of PFAS compounds will bring claims for contribution against landfills and other passive receivers, generating significant litigation costs. EPA's exercise of enforcement discretion will not insulate landfills from this litigation.

- These costs will be passed along to communities, water and wastewater treatment facilities, and biosolids management, all of which rely on the services of MSW landfills.

Broad Unintended Consequences

- **CERCLA regulation will impel landfills to restrict inbound wastes and/or increase disposal costs for media with elevated levels of PFAS, including filters, biosolids, and impacted soils at Department of Defense facilities.** The mere prospect of regulation in this area is already disrupting the interdependence of the drinking water, wastewater, and solid waste sectors.
- Food waste compost may contain PFAS due to contact with PFAS-lined packaging materials. As a result, a CERCLA designation could result in communities diverting food waste from organics recycling programs, hindering federal, state, and local climate and waste reduction goals.
- Cost increases likely will have a significant disproportionate impact on low-income households that rely on the affordability of services that the solid waste sector provides.

Recommendation

Although our sector is simultaneously pursuing “no action assurance” from EPA, the agency historically has been very hesitant to provide this relief given its policy that assurances should be given only “in extremely unusual cases.” As such, and acknowledging that EPA may have limited authority to act on our request, we recommend providing the following narrow exemption from CERCLA liability that affords relief to landfills and other passive receivers of PFAS¹:

(a) IN GENERAL.—No publicly owned or operated community water system (as defined at 42 U.S.C. 300f), publicly owned treatment works (as defined at 33 U.S.C. 1292), or municipal solid waste landfill (as defined at 40 C.F.R. 258.2) shall be liable under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 (42 U.S.C. 9601 et seq.) for the costs of responding to, or damages resulting from, a release to the environment of a perfluoroalkyl or polyfluoroalkyl substance designated as a hazardous substance under section 102(a) of such Act that resulted from the discharge of effluent, the disposal or management of biosolids, the disposal of filtration media resin, or the discharge of leachate where such actions are in compliance with Federal or State law and all applicable permits.

(b) EXCEPTION.—Subsection (a) shall not apply with respect to any discharge described in such subsection that results from any gross negligence, willful misconduct, or noncompliance with any Federal or State law or permit governing the discharge of effluent, disposal or management of biosolids, disposal of filtration media resin, or waste disposal.

Thank you for your consideration of our request, and we look forward to continuing to partner with the federal government to ensure the safe and effective management of waste streams containing PFAS.

Sincerely,

National Waste & Recycling Association
Solid Waste Association of North America

cc: Senate EPW Committee Members
House T&I and E&C Committee Members

¹ The exemption would not extend to underlying soil and groundwater contamination from a MSW landfill or to facilities other than MSW landfills that accept waste streams with elevated concentrations of PFAS.