



P.O. Box 278
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Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Testimony on: SB225 “Environment-Publicly-Owned Treatment Works—PFAS Monitoring”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 9, 2023

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports SB225, which mandates that publicly owned treatment works owners or operators monitor and report levels of certain per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in effluent, influent and biosolids or wastewater sludge. It is important that we know the amounts of PFAS chemicals in our water systems and, by monitoring the influent and effluent, we can also know how the water treatment process affects the levels of PFAS. This information is critical because the purpose of a wastewater treatment plant is to clean water so that it can be safely released into the environment. Testing of the biosolids or wastewater sludge is also critical as they are a waste product of the treatment process and typically applied to land. If this sludge contains PFAS chemicals, then we are introducing PFAS into the soil when we use land application as a disposal method.

PFAS chemicals have a strong carbon-fluorine bond which makes them difficult to destroy. This leads to persistence in the environment, including soil and water contamination. When land-applied PFAS migrate through soil profile, they can reach drainage water and shallow ground water. Industrial dischargers have caused unusually elevated levels of PFAS in land-applied biosolids.

PFAS has been confirmed in drinking water in more than 2,000 communities nationwide.¹ Another route of exposure is the consumption of contaminated fish or food grown on land that has been contaminated with PFAS compounds. The Environmental Working Group reports possible consequences to human health include links to cancer, reproductive harm, immune system damage, delayed neurological development in children, and numerous other serious health problems.²

Improved information is needed on PFAS contamination, so that we can begin to implement solutions. Monitoring our wastewater effluent, influent, and biosolids would begin to address this need by giving us additional information on the scope of PFAS contamination. For these reasons, we recommend a favorable report on SB225.

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¹ <https://www.ewg.org/news-insights/news-release/2022/06/more-2000-communities-have-drinking-water-forever-chemicals>

² <https://www.ewg.org/areas-focus/toxic-chemicals/pfas-chemicals>

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.