

July 21, 2026

The Honorable Dale R. Marks
Assistant Secretary of Defense
Energy, Installations, and Environment
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Assistant Secretary Marks:

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the latest delays to the Department's efforts to remediate water sources contaminated with perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). This most recent delay, which will push back the Department's remediation timelines by an average of a decade, will have severe consequences for military communities living around nearly 200 military installations with PFAS-contaminated water.

PFAS chemicals, which are commonly referred to as "forever chemicals" due to their inability to degrade naturally, persist in soil and water for decades. When people drink water contaminated with PFAS, these chemicals can build up in the body over time and cause serious health problems.¹ Growing research shows that PFAS exposure is linked to major health concerns, including certain types of cancers, fertility issues, and can damage the immune system. Military bases and their surrounding communities are particularly affected by PFAS due to their long history of using Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF) for firefighting.

In 2017, the Department began investigating the extent of contamination at individual military installations. Since then, Congress has appropriated over \$3.1 billion to support the Department's PFAS remediation efforts. In last year's defense spending bill, I provided an additional \$107 million for PFAS cleanup and related activities.

Despite these efforts, this administration has failed to prioritize providing safe drinking water for military communities even within its massive \$1.15 trillion budget request for the Department. Additionally, it has attempted to distance itself from this responsibility. In May, the Department submitted a legislative proposal to Congress that would eliminate reporting requirements for PFAS contamination.

¹ Yale Sustainability, "Yale Experts Explain PFAS 'Forever Chemicals,'" Yale University, May 20, 2025, <https://sustainability.yale.edu/explainers/yale-experts-explain-pfas-forever-chemicals>

Now, after delaying its PFAS cleanup program last year,² the Department has announced additional delays that push cleanup timelines back by an average of a decade. The delays will affect sites in 42 states across the nation, including two installations in my home state of Washington: Yakima Training Center will be delayed by 13.5 years and Joint Base Lewis-McChord will be delayed 17 years.³

Not only am I concerned by the delay itself, but I am also disappointed by the way the Department executed this decision. Instead of consulting with community leaders and announcing the delays to the public, the Department instead chose to quietly remove the previous cleanup schedule from its website and publish new timelines. This is ultimately a violation of trust between military leaders and their surrounding communities.

In order to provide greater clarity for residents affected by these delays, I request a briefing no later than August 21 with an explanation for the most recent delays and how they relate to the delays announced in 2025. Additionally, please provide written responses to the following questions:

1. Why did the Department extend the timelines in the investigation of PFAS contamination at Joint Base Lewis-McChord and Yakima Training Center?
 - a. How was it determined which bases would be impacted by the delay?
 - b. How is the Department working in the short-term and the long-term to support communities impacted by the delays in PFAS cleanup?
2. Has any funding dedicated to PFAS contamination remediation been redirected to other priorities unrelated to PFAS?
3. Does the Department still plan on banning the purchase and use of firefighting foam containing PFAS by September 30, 2026?
 - a. What actions is the Department taking to find alternative chemicals to use to put out fires on the airfield?
4. How were the changes in timelines associated with PFAS investigations communicated to the affected military installations and their surrounding communities?
 - a. Who was notified of the timeline changes?
 - b. How will you work with community leaders near affected installations to provide clean water to residents?
 - c. Why was there no public announcement prior to the adjustment of timelines?

The Department has a responsibility to ensure the health and safety of its service members, their families, and surrounding communities. These delays are a danger to people's health and could have other long-term consequences. Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

² Hiroko Tabuchi, "Defense Department Delays Cleanup of 'Forever Chemicals' Nationwide," *The New York Times*, September 23, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/23/climate/military-defense-pfas-forever-chemicals-cleanup-delay.html>

³ Anna Kramer and Joe Gould, "The Pentagon Quietly Delayed PFAS Cleanup Across Nearly 200 Military Sites," *NOTUS*, June 12, 2026, <https://www.notus.org/climate-environment/pentagon-quietly-delayed-pfas-cleanup-nearly-200-military-sites>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patty Murray". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Patty" and the last name "Murray" written in a connected style.

Patty Murray
United States Senator