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Small Water Utilities Cannot Achieve PFAS Cleanup On Their Own.

COMMENTARY | Limited budgets, smaller customer bases and skeleton crews put a heavier PFAS burden on rural systems; polluters should be held accountable.

In the United States, 95% of all public water systems have less than 10,000 customers (79% serve fewer than 500 people), and nearly 85% of those systems have three or fewer full-time employees. With such small staffs, many historically have suffered from "management limitations, lack of long-term planning, and difficulty understanding current and future regulations."

The Environmental Protection Agency has now released final Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) for PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, aka "forever chemicals") in drinking water. The regulation targets six specific compounds and has two key deadlines: initial monitoring for these PFAS by April 2027 and mitigation of these PFAS, if detected above the MCLs, by April 2029.

The costs of meeting these two deadlines may include: monitoring and testing; piloting, designing and installing a treatment system; operator training; operation and maintenance of the treatment system; disposal and/or destruction of PFAS-contaminated filter media; and public notification regarding PFAS levels and violations. The EPA has estimated that the costs of monitoring, communication and treatment alone could reach as high as $1.5 billion per year. The costs of not meeting these deadlines may include penalties and liability.

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Route Fifty

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