

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

July 31, 2019

The Honorable Mark T. Esper, Ph.D.  
Secretary of Defense  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon,  
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Esper:

We write to express deep concern over the recently reported discovery of per- and polyfluoroalkyl (PFAS) substances in certain private and commercial groundwater sources near the northwestern and eastern boundaries of Dover Air Force Base (Dover AFB).<sup>1</sup> We note your commitment to “own” the PFAS contaminations across Department of Defense installations and your recent announcement of a PFAS Task Force to tackle this issue.<sup>2,3</sup> While we are encouraged by these actions and by the 436<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing’s immediate efforts to mitigate exposure to affected communities through the provision of bottled water, we urge you to take additional actions to ensure that impacted residents and businesses have access to safe sources of drinking water going forward.

Early reports suggest the contamination may have derived from the PFAS materials found in aqueous film forming foam (AFFF) deployed in the recent past in the northern portion of Dover AFB.<sup>4</sup> As you are aware, AFFF is a fire suppressant agent used at military installations, including Dover AFB, and has been associated with a variety of adverse human health effects, including birth defects and immune system dysfunction.

These chemicals pose a severe public health concern, and we urge the Department and the Air Force to put long-term plans in place for monitoring contamination around Dover AFB and protecting local residents from drinking contaminated groundwater. A recent analysis by the Union of Concerned Scientists found Dover AFB to have the fourth highest reported PFAS contamination of over 100 tested military installations in the United States.<sup>5</sup> As experts at Dover AFB acknowledge, contaminated groundwater may migrate and impact other water sources over

---

<sup>1</sup> Office of the Governor of the State of Delaware, John Carney. *USAF, Dover AFB advise state agencies that PFAS chemicals exceeding EPA health advisory found in four wells near base*. July 14, 2019. Accessed July 23, 2019. <https://news.delaware.gov/2019/07/14/usaf-dover-afb-advise-state-agencies-that-pfas-chemicals-exceeding-epa-health-advisory-found-in-four-wells-near-base/>

<sup>2</sup> Esper, Mark T. *Hearing to Conduct a Confirmation Hearing on the Expected Nomination of: Honorable Mark T. Esper to be Secretary of Defense*. Senate, 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, First Session, July 16, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Secretary of Defense Dr. Mark T. Esper, *Media Availability with Secretary Esper*. July 24, 2019. Accessed July 29, 2019. <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1915743/media-availability-with-secretary-esper/>

<sup>4</sup> Eichmann, Mark. “In Delaware, four more PFAS-contaminated water wells found near Dover Air Force Base.” *WHYY*. July 17, 2019. Accessed July 23, 2019. <https://stateimpact.npr.org/pennsylvania/2019/07/17/in-delaware-four-more-pfas-contaminated-water-wells-found-near-dover-air-force-base/>

<sup>5</sup> Genna Reed, et al, *A Toxic Threat: Fact Sheet*. Cambridge: Union of Concerned Scientists, September 2018. Accessed July 23, 2019. <https://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/attach/2018/09/a-toxic-threat-pfs-military-fact-sheet-ucs-2018.pdf>

time.<sup>6</sup> It is imperative that the Department provide the necessary resources to the 436<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing to prevent further PFAS contamination and address existing PFAS contamination.

To facilitate an effective and complete response to these exposures, we respectfully request that the Department provide regular and periodic updates to the congressional delegation on the progress in addressing PFAS contamination at the airbase, as well as the following information:

1. Details on the development of an action plan, if one does not exist, to remediate the current contamination, reliably ascertain the full extent of contamination, and ensure no further contamination will follow.
2. A map identifying all of the contaminated wells, suspected sources, tested wells, and the searched area; and information that would clarify the basis for determining the nature and extent of monitoring conducted to date, as well as the wells chosen for monitoring.
3. Details of the current investigation including groundwater testing results; efforts to determine the source(s) of contamination; the location of any firefighting training activities, use of fire pits or other locations for such training, and any other suspected sources; and any and all reports of discharges of AFFF at suspected sites.
4. Analysis of previous investigations, including those conducted in 2014, to ensure those sites were accurately tested.
5. An assessment of the feasibility of providing affected residents and businesses with municipal water sources.
6. A report on any and all notifications to civilian employees, servicemembers, and the surrounding communities who were potentially exposed, including any and all provided health advisories.
7. Analysis or planned analysis of potential future off-base contamination due to PFAS migration via groundwater, including a map showing groundwater flow gradients on and surrounding the airbase.

Finally, we respectfully request that you, or a knowledgeable delegate from the Department or the Air Force, conduct a site visit to Dover AFB as soon as possible and provide affected stakeholders an explanation of the Air Force's remediation efforts regarding these exposures. Please provide the congressional delegation notice prior to the visit.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



THOMAS R. CARPER  
United States Senator

CHRISTOPHER A. COONS  
United States Senator

LISA BLUNT ROCHESTER  
Member of Congress

CC: Hon. Matthew Donovan, Acting Secretary of the Air Force  
Hon. John W. Henderson, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Installations, Environment and Energy

---

<sup>6</sup> Eichmann, 2019.