

To: Mark Gordon
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Department of Ecology
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Transmitted via electronic public comment form: <https://tcp.ecology.commentinput.com/?id=N4Uca>

3 March 2023

RE: Draft PFAS guidance for investigating & remediating PFAS contamination in Washington State.

Dear Mr. Gordon,

Thank you for taking the time to consider our comments on this Draft Guidance for addressing PFAS contamination in Washington State. We appreciate Ecology for creating this document and being ahead of the curve in regards to tackling widespread PFAS contamination. We are grateful that Ecology is not waiting for PFAS regulation to trickle down from the Federal government at every step of the process. By acting faster, we can prevent and curb more PFAS contamination and the adverse health effects associated with PFAS exposure in Washington state.

RE Sources is a non-profit organization located in northwest Washington and founded in 1982. We mobilize people in Northwest Washington to build just and thriving communities and to protect the land, water and climate on which we all depend. Our priority programs include Protecting the Salish Sea, Freshwater Restoration, Climate Action, and Fighting Pollution—all critical issues affecting our region. Our North Sound Baykeeper is also a member of the Waterkeeper Alliance, with over 300 organizations in 34 countries around the world that promote fishable, swimmable, drinkable water. RE Sources has thousands of supporters in Whatcom, Skagit, and San Juan counties, and we submit these comments on their behalf.

Most of our comments on this draft guidance document are actually in the form of questions related to how this will be applied in the field, at the local level, and how our state will be addressing PFAS contamination on the whole. Several studies carried out in Bellingham in recent years have detected PFAS. They are in our sewage solids, sewage effluent, marine sediments, and marine mussels^{1,2,3}. Furthermore, the detection of PFAS is most likely underestimated as our technology for detecting PFAS has been more accurate and refined in the last couple of years. *Because PFAS contamination is so widespread, how*

will Ecology effectively assess where PFAS contamination is across the state and how will they prioritize the cleanup so it is fair and equitable?

People harvest crab and other seafood regularly from Bellingham Bay and to our knowledge there has not been any research to show how much PFAS is found in the crabs, fish, or seaweed harvested here. Since PFAS has been detected in Bellingham Bay mussels⁴ at elevated levels, we suspect that will be the case for other seafood as well. *We encourage Ecology to prioritize testing commonly harvested seafood in Bellingham Bay for PFAS and other contaminants of concern and to make this information publicly available.* Even extremely small amounts of PFAS can have adverse health effects and the crab caught in Bellingham Bay could exceed these small amounts. Despite the ubiquitous nature of PFAS, the general public does not fully understand the hazards of PFAS and the likely routes of exposure.

PFAS continues to contaminate our surface waters mainly through stormwater and wastewater discharges, therefore, *what efforts will be in place to ensure that the areas that are cleaned up from PFAS and other contaminants are not recontaminated?* Millions upon millions of dollars have been spent cleaning up legacy toxics; we need to make sure that the same mistakes are not made today as they were in the past. We feel that it is important to determine where the PFAS is coming from so the sources can be addressed. In Appendix 3 of the PFAS Chemical Action Plan, 43 sites in Whatcom County have been identified as a potential source of PFAS. We think it is important to make this list public and easy to access, so more people are aware of the potential sources of PFAS contamination and can collectively work to curb its release. It will also help people understand how PFAS can travel through the ecosystem.

There are currently 12 designated MTCA cleanup sites along Bellingham Bay in varying stages of the cleanup process. *How will this guidance document affect cleanup sites already complete or in progress?* At one of the cleanup sites, I & J Waterway, there was an industrial fire where a lot of firefighter foam was used. This seems like a potential place for PFAS to be found, will this be assessed prior to its anticipated cleanup this year? *Likewise, we have 4 former landfills along the waterfront; will we be able to learn if these are contaminated with PFAS?*

We know that PFAS is found in our sewage sludge and is released back into the environment through the discharge of effluent and the landspreading of biosolids. We need to explore mechanisms to minimize the amount of PFAS being discharged into our surface waters at our wastewater treatment plants and we need to halt the land spreading of biosolids immediately. It is contradictory of Ecology to knowingly (and legally) allow the reintroduction of PFAS into the environment while simultaneously working to reduce the amount of PFAS through the PFAS Chemical Action Plan and this Guidance document. *Can you please explain this contradiction?*

Currently, a lot of environmental monitoring and reporting is carried out by nonprofits like RE Sources and other community scientists. In recent years we have seen an increase in communication between scientists, regulators, and concerned community members and we hope to see that trend continue. With any document that Ecology produces, we hope that it will be written for a broader audience, not just for experts in the field. One way to make a document more usable is to provide examples of how the information may be used in the field. How would a Site Manager apply the numbers provided in the various tables out in the field? What does it look like to apply the information in this document to a real life situation? It would also be helpful if there were complete descriptions for each table so that each table could stand alone, apart from the body of text. Also, including tables that are no longer relevant is confusing. It is also helpful if the same units are used consistently throughout the document (in this case choosing between mg or µg).

PFAS is only 1 chemical class amongst hundreds of others that are currently contaminating our environment. We are thankful that Ecology is working to address PFAS contamination and also hope it can work to regulate the thousands of other unregulated chemicals. Holding chemical producers and users accountable needs to be considered so that we can stop making and releasing these chemicals in the first place.

Thank-you for reading and answering our questions and comments.

Sincerely,

Kirsten McDade
Pollution Prevention Specialist

Citations:

¹City of Bellingham. 2021. Post Point Wastewater Resource Recovery Project Archive. 2021 Wastewater Test Results - full report. Retrieved from:
<https://cob.org/services/utilities/waste-water-treatment/archived-resource-recovery>

²Long, E.R., Dutch, M., Weakland, S., Chandramouli, B., Benskin, J.P., 2013. Quantification of pharmaceuticals, personal care products, and perfluoroalkyl substances in the marine sediments of Puget Sound, Washington, USA. *Environ. Toxicol. Chem.* 32, 1701–1710.

³James C.A, Lanksbury, J.A., Khangaonkar, T., West, J.E., 2020. Evaluating exposures of bay mussels (*Mytilus trossulus*) to contaminants of emerging concern through environmental sampling and hydrodynamic modeling. *Science of The Total Environment* 709:136098.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2019.136098>



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⁴Langness, M. 2022. WDFW Nearshore Contaminant Monitoring program. Presentation at Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference.