

Testimony of Emily Marpe
Before the
Environment and Climate Change Subcommittee
of the
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
on
“Protecting Americans at Risk of PFAS Contamination and Exposure”
May 15, 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Emily Marpe, and until recently, I was a resident of an upstate New York home my family once called “Cloud Nine.”

On February 11, 2016, I received a letter from the Rensselaer County Health Department. The letter offered free water sampling and reassurance that PFOA had been detected in our water but that the levels were not likely to be above EPA guidelines.

Residents were being given bottled water – but only during the town clerk’s office hours, and only if you had tickets, which was a major inconvenience for a working mom with two kids. For the first time in my life, I had to ration my water.

On March 2, my tap water was tested. On March 12, my daughter, Gwen, and I returned home from recycling our bottles and found a message on the answering machine from Rich Elder, from the Rensselaer County Health Department. I called Rich, and he told me: “You guys better stop brushing your teeth” with tap water.

The test results for the water in my home in Petersburg showed PFOA levels of 2,100 parts per trillion.

I immediately dropped to me knees and started to dry-heave while still on the phone. Rich tried to comfort me by saying it was like a drop of water in an Olympic-sized pool, that I would be the first on the list to get a filter.

That was the day I was forced to become an expert on PFOA – something no mom should ever have to do.

Before moving into Cloud Nine, we lived in a two-bedroom, one-bath trailer. At times, there were seven of us in the trailer.

In 2010, with help from my mom, I began the long and daunting process of buying my dream home – a spacious three-bedroom ranch on 2.38 acres in Petersburg, with no neighbors in sight and a view to die for.



Although it was my dream house, many repairs were needed, and my family and I spent a month working around the clock to make the necessary upgrades. Every step of the process, I'd joke, was a different cloud, until the seller handed me the keys and I said, "I am on Cloud Nine."

Our family tradition is to name our properties, and my stepfather surprised me with a sign in the shape of a cloud and the words "Cloud Nine."



That day in October 2011 when my two children walked to the end of the driveway to finally pull out the "For Sale" sign was probably the proudest moment of my life. I wasn't even 30 and I had my own home.



Little did I know then that our closest neighbor – Taconic Plastic – would change everything we had worked so hard for.

After the call from Rich, I learned everything I could about PFOA. The more I read, the more upset, anxious and angry I became. With the help of Michael Hickey, who detected PFAS in the water after his dad died from kidney cancer, I learned about the impacts of PFOA on other communities, including Parkersburg. The more I read, the more I realized that town officials were trying to play down the water contamination crisis. After I raised concerns, one town supervisor accused me of threatening hundreds of jobs. Nevertheless, I resolved to be at every town meeting and to take my case to state officials in Albany. It was not a role I ever wanted, but no one else was willing to step up to the plate.

Around the same time, my daughter, Gwen, was diagnosed with a lump in her breast, which sent me into a tailspin, given everything I had learned about the links between PFOA, cancer and other health effects. None of the people charged with protecting families like ours were listening – not even the medical community. By March 21, I was so beside myself with fear that I was rushed to the emergency room with a panic attack. I was so afraid of our water that our family didn't shower without the window open.

The next day, Taconic Plastic offered to install a water filtration system into my home. But when the contractor came, he refused to share any documentation. It was only after I threatened to call the local news station that two Taconic Plastic employees relented.

On March 31, my family had their blood tested for PFOA. Many of my neighbors were being denied blood testing and water filters unless the PFOA in their well water was above 70 ppt.

On June 6, we finally got the blood test results in the mail. I stopped my car in the driveway and opened each envelope.

Keep in mind that the national average for PFOA in blood is about 2 parts per billion, or ppb.

I opened my son's first, because he spent weekends with his father, and I figured his results would be the lowest. I was right, but the number still shocked me: 103 ppb

Next I opened my daughter Gwen's results: 207 ppb.

Then I open the results for me and my boyfriend: 322 ppb and 418 ppb, respectively.

I was completely floored. We had only been living in Cloud Nine for four and a half years!

Less than two weeks later, I learned that the water in our local elementary school was also contaminated with PFOA.

I knew I had to sell my dream house, even though we would ultimately lose all the equity we had built. For a while, we split up among friends and were basically homeless. Ultimately, we bought a home in Hoosick Falls. The mortgage is more expensive, my daughter has been forced to change schools, I have a longer drive to work – and we still have to buy bottled water.

In December 2017, I found out I was pregnant. I was concerned from the start about birth defects and, as an expert on PFOA, I knew that I would not be able to breastfeed my baby.

Most women at 20 weeks are excited to find out the sex of their baby; I was just relieved that Eliana's eyes were in the right place and she had two nostrils.

Not surprisingly, she weighed just over six pounds, the smallest of my three children. I say "not surprisingly" because low birth-weight is a common health effect of PFAS chemicals like PFOA.

When my baby Eliana was just seven weeks old, we had her blood tested. To get it done, I had to hold her down while she screamed. The result: 75.9 ppb, even though it had been more than two years since I had stopped drinking contaminated water.

As I said, no mom should ever have to go through I've been through.

Congress needs to treat this contamination crisis like a crisis. It needs to end PFAS pollution and clean up PFAS contamination. At a minimum, Congress needs to force companies like Taconic Plastic to report their PFAS releases and force our water utilities to tell us if our drinking water is polluted with PFAS chemicals.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.