

**Erin Brockovich
Testimony for the Record**

Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Subcommittee

of the

House Committee on Appropriations

on

Impact of PFAS Exposure on Service Members

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Honorable Chairman Wasserman-Schultz and Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies

I am Erin Brockovich.

I'm a military mom. Two of my children served in the U.S. Army, and my son served a tour in Afghanistan. All Americans who serve give the ultimate sacrifice to protect and defend our country. They shouldn't have to sacrifice their health years after their service is complete.

It would be much better for you, our representatives, to hear from the tens of thousands of military men and women, firefighters, spouses, children, brothers and sisters, friends, neighbors, and family members who write to me.

Today, I am here for them.

Across our country, families are exposed to dangerous chemicals in their water—and the families most at risk are those living on or near current and former military bases.

PFAS, or per- and polyfluorinated alkyl substances, are a class of synthetic chemicals that are silently ubiquitous and persistent in the environment—and highly toxic. Their ability to repel oil and water and persist at high temperatures makes them attractive for use in everyday items like nonstick cookware, food packaging, water-repellent gear, and, in the case of the military, firefighting foam used to extinguish jet fuel fires.

So far, the Department of Defense (DoD) has identified 651 active and BRAC installations in the United States with a known or suspected release of PFAS.¹

The PFAS levels detected in the groundwater on or near these bases should alarm all of us.

¹ <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/1930618/dod-moving-forward-with-task-force-to-address-pfas>

At many bases – including England Air Force Base, Naval Air Station China Lake, Patrick Airforce Base, Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Altus Air Force Base – PFAS detections the in groundwater top 1 million parts per trillion.

As you know, EPA’s advisory level is 70 parts per trillion, and many states have now concluded safe PFAS levels are actually between 10 and 20 parts per trillion.

So, it is deeply worrying that more than 100 bases have detected PFAS at levels greater than 30,000 parts per trillion.

Until recently, service members at these bases drank water with PFAS. At some bases, PFAS levels in the drinking water are still above the levels state officials consider safe.²

People have contacted me for years about polluted military sites. Many of them had tried connecting with local officials, but no one was willing to listen or to help.

Who are they supposed to turn to for the answers that they deserve?

They share with me how they or their family members were sick with kidney issues, testicular cancers, or dealing with fertility issues.

What surprised me is how they found out about these contaminations—not from the VA or DoD, but from local news stories or NGO websites.

I don’t want to blame one agency or person, but I do want to convey the voices and stories of those who have been harmed.

James Bussey, a retired veteran who served from 1989 to 1992 at Wurtsmith Air Force Base in Oscoda, Michigan, told me he felt like he was a test subject. He drank the water on base and remembers crawling through AFFF, during drills at Wurtsmith. He started a group in 2016 to raise awareness after Michigan health officials issued a drinking water advisory for PFAS in Oscoda.

He has dozens of health issue, including chronic liver disease. He can’t have children. Most of his disability benefit claims have been denied. Many of the people from his group have died.

AFFF, used since the late 1960 to put out jet fuel fires at places like Wurtsmith, also soaked into the ground, contaminating groundwater and surface water at these installations and in the surrounding communities.

Talk to residents of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, home to former Pease Air Force Base.

The abandoned military outpost is now home to apartment buildings, trendy restaurants, offices, and daycare centers.

² <https://www.ewg.org/release/foia-data-tap-water-28-military-bases-tainted-forever-chemicals-above-states-safety>

In 2014, Andrea Amico learned from a newspaper article that the drinking water in her community was highly contaminated with these toxic substances.

Like so many other community members I've worked with, officials did not respond to her calls or emails asking questions about how the water could affect the health of her family. So, she started her own campaign to get blood tests provided to everyone exposed to the water.

While I recognize today is about our closed facilities; Luke and Cannon Air Force Bases have been forced to provide bottled water a result of PFAS, while others like Langley Air Force Base remain silent barely below federal notification levels.

Now, DOD is refusing to provide to safe water for some of the folks near the base who rely on wells for their drinking water. ³

Across the country, DOD is refusing to tell people like James and Andrea what any of us would want to know:

- How extensive is PFAS pollution in my community?
- When will DOD confirm the presence of PFAS in the groundwater?
- When will DOD end non-essential uses of PFAS in items like food packaging and cosmetics?
- What do I do if I have high PFAS levels in my blood?
- And, most importantly, when will DOD clean up the contamination that threatens the health of my family and my neighbors?

The DOD helped invent AFFF and has known it was toxic since the 1970s.⁴

So, why didn't the DOD alert service members after 3M came clean in 2000 and warned DOD officials that PFOS, the main ingredient in AFFF, was toxic?⁵

Why didn't DOD stop the use of AFFF and replace it with safer alternatives?

Why did DOD wait until 2011 to let service members, especially our military firefighters, know that PFAS could cause cancer and harm their reproductive and immune systems?⁶

Why has it taken an act of Congress to get DOD to stop using AFFF?

It's time for DOD to take responsibility for PFAS pollution. In particular, it's time for DOD to tell people like James and Andrea when this toxic mess will be cleaned up.

³ <https://www.ewg.org/news-and-analysis/2021/02/will-pentagon-continue-flout-state-standards-forever-chemicals>

⁴ <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AP/AP18/20200311/110704/HHRG-116-AP18-Wstate-FaberS-20200311.pdf>

⁵ https://static.ewg.org/reports/2019/pfas-dod-timeline/2000_Navy-Memo.pdf?_ga=2.228639071.272363567.1616338929-1810930854.1612824141

⁶ https://static.ewg.org/reports/2019/pfas-dod-timeline/2011_AFFF-Risk-Alert.pdf?_ga=2.235613634.272363567.1616338929-1810930854.1612824141

PFAS contaminate the blood and organs of nearly every living being, and experts estimate that 25 percent of Americans have troubling levels of PFAS in their blood serum. The levels in the blood of our service members, and residents of defense communities, is likely to be even higher. Is DOD prepared to help our veterans and active-duty personnel make sense of the risks posed by PFAS in their blood?

Our servicemembers and our defense communities make enormous sacrifices to keep us safe. We should do our part to keep them safe.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.