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United States Senate

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October 9, 2024

The Honorable Robert P. Storch
Inspector General
Office of Inspector General
U.S. Department of Defense
4800 Mark Center Drive
Alexandria, VA 22350-1500

Dear Inspector General Storch:

I am writing to request a comprehensive report demonstrating how the Department of Defense's (DoD) efforts to remediate harmful per-and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) have progressed, with a particular focus on the former Wurtsmith Air Force Base (Wurtsmith), Camp Grayling Joint Maneuver Training Center (Camp Grayling), and surrounding communities of Oscoda and Grayling, Michigan. I am further writing to clarify unanswered questions regarding this toxic exposure that remain a concern for me, members of our Armed Forces, and residents of Michigan.

PFAS chemicals remain a grave danger to the health of our communities and environment. Residents of Oscoda and Grayling, Michigan, continue to cope with exposure from toxic PFAS chemicals stemming from the decades of extensive use of Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF) fire suppressant at Wurtsmith and Camp Grayling. While I am pleased that we have been able to increase resources and personnel to remedy these harmful chemicals, I remain concerned for the health and well-being of my constituents in these communities. These toxic "forever chemicals" persist in the environment and cause extensive contamination to drinking water sources and freshwater ecosystems.

In 2019, I sent a letter to then Secretary of the Air Force, Heather Wilson, expressing concern over the Air Force PFAS cleanup operations at Wurtsmith and the surrounding Oscoda community.¹ That same year, Representative Dan Kildee, led a letter to then DoD Acting Inspector General Glenn Fine, requesting a review of the DoD's use of PFAS at military sites around the country and the exposure to both military personnel and civilians living near these sites.² In 2021, I then sent another letter to BRAC Environmental Coordinator, Dr. Catharine Varley, expressing my concern regarding the accuracy of the reported spread of PFAS into the Van Etten Lake area surrounding Wurtsmith.³ This spring, my staff met with leadership from the United States Air

¹ Letter from Chairman Gary C. Peters, United States Senate, to Secretary Heather Wilson (Jan. 31, 2019).

² Congressman Dan Kildee: Congressman Dan Kildee Leads Efforts to Press the Defense Department on Accountability for PFAS Contamination (July 25, 2019).

³ Letter from Chairman Gary C. Peters, and Debbie Stabenow, United States Senate, Daniel T. Kildee, and Elissa Slotkin, United States Congress, to Dr. Catharine Varley (April 20, 2021).

Force, Army National Guard, DoD, State of Michigan, and the communities in Oscoda and Grayling to examine the PFAS remediation efforts underway and the extent of progress. The findings from this visit solidified my resolve for the continued evaluation of the DoD's actions from the Office of Inspector General (OIG).

While I appreciate the resulting report from the DoD OIG, five years later, many questions remain unanswered. With the recent progress on developing maximum contaminant levels (MCLs) and viable cleanup methods for PFAS, some Interim Remedial Actions (IRAs) are now underway at Wurtsmith and Camp Grayling. These IRAs are not the final solution, and more work is required to fully address these contaminated sites. Therefore, I request an updated analysis of the DoD's efforts to address PFAS contamination at current and former military bases across the country that build on questions originally brought to your office's attention in 2019. Your timely response to my questions would provide meaningful insight into the DoD's PFAS remediation efforts:

1. What methodology is the DoD using to determine the scope of the problem and how to allocate its resources to address it?
 - a. Has the DoD updated this methodology to account for the new maximum contaminant levels (MCLs) and if so, how? If not, what is the timeline and plan for updating the methodology as soon as possible?
 - b. As PFAS bioaccumulates, how is the DoD sampling fish and benthic organisms within the food web in nearby bodies of water to determine the extent of contamination that could impact human health?
 - c. How is the DoD sampling at each site to determine the highest concentrations of PFAS as well as the complete plumes of contamination? To what extent is vertical aquifer sampling and sampling at the groundwater-surface water interface prioritized?
 - d. When collecting and reporting plume data to determine the scope of the problem, how and when does DoD determine whether that data is dated and needs to be updated?

2. Can you describe what work the DoD has done with service members, their families, and impacted communities to remediate drinking water contamination and mitigate health risks?
 - a. What public engagement strategies have been effective? Where does the DoD need to improve collaboration?
 - b. How does DoD determine the most technically competent staff to discuss remedial actions during technical sessions with Restoration Advisory Boards and communities? What expertise and familiarity with the site must they have?

3. What is the DoD's plan to discontinue the use of PFAS chemicals?
 - a. The Fiscal Year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act prohibited the DoD's use of fluorinated aqueous film-forming foam (AFFF) on military installations by October 1, 2024, unless the Secretary of Defense waives the prohibition of use.⁴

⁴ National Defense Authorization Act of 2020, Pub. L. 116-92, Sec. 322.

Has DoD met this timeline, and if not, what more needs to be done to achieve this requirement?

4. Can you describe the DoD's efforts and future plans to rapidly mitigate the further spread of PFAS and clean up current PFAS contamination in the environment, including in soil, groundwater, and drinking water?
 - a. How is the DoD prioritizing its cleanup strategy within each contaminated site, including across its sites currently undergoing interim remedial actions (IRAs)?
 - b. How is the DoD investing in research to identify novel ways to efficiently remediate PFAS contamination in water, soil, or other media, and what plans if any are in place to test and implement these technologies when available?
 - c. How is the DoD ensuring that filtration technologies such as granular activated carbon, ion exchange resins, and other inorganic treatment strategies are properly disposed of after use to prevent water and soil contamination?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Gary C. Peters
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs
