

Orange County Water Agencies Respond Swiftly to New Federal Ruling on PFAS



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PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) are a large group of man-made chemicals used since the 1940s in common household and commercial products. PFAS chemicals are often used to keep food from sticking to cookware but are also used to make clothes, carpets, and furniture resistant to water and stains. Firefighting foams used to extinguish fuel and oil fires have historically also contained PFAS.

While chemical manufacturers are the original source of PFAS chemicals, Orange County water agencies have been actively addressing PFAS due to its detection in the Orange County Groundwater Basin. The basin, managed by the Orange County Water District (OCWD), provides 85% of the drinking water supply for 19 cities and retail water districts in north and central Orange County, who serve a collective 2.5 million people.

Fifteen Orange County agencies and approximately 100 wells have been affected by various state and federal regulations on PFAS. Most recently, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) established Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) for six PFAS chemicals, which requires treatment on dozens of groundwater wells.

Working collaboratively with the city of Fullerton, OCWD is intensifying efforts to combat PFAS contamination. The latest PFAS ruling from the EPA brings the total number of impacted wells in the city to nine. Consistent with the requirements of the new MCLs, water providers will work expeditiously to design and construct more PFAS treatment facilities to restore impacted groundwater wells within the five-year compliance period.

The county's first PFAS treatment plant came online in the city of Fullerton in June 2021, located on Kimberly Ave. and Raymond Ave., and a second facility, located nearby in Anaheim became operational in April 2024 and will service Fullerton wells. Overall, OCWD's early efforts to build PFAS treatment facilities have already brought approximately 40 wells back online.



This PFAS Treatment Plant, referred to as the Fullerton Main Plant, came online in April 2024.

PFAS contamination remains OCWD's top priority—it's a significant and costly challenge. The estimated cost of addressing PFAS in Orange County over the next 30 years is approximately \$1.8 billion. OCWD has undertaken various measures to protect

water quality and customers, including legal actions against polluters and advocating for legislation to fund PFAS cleanup while ensuring water agencies aren't held liable.

The District's Philip L. Anthony Water Quality Laboratory was the first public agency laboratory in California to achieve state certification to analyze for PFAS in drinking water. It had launched the nation's largest pilot project to test different types of treatment media to determine the most effective solution that will restore the impacted drinking water supply. Additionally, the District's board of directors has committed to funding 100% of the design and construction, and 50% of the operation and maintenance costs for treatment facilities.

OCWD and the public water systems it serves provide safe and reliable drinking water that consistently meets all state and federal drinking water standards, and the District is doing everything it can to address the issue of PFAS promptly. Learn more by visiting the [PFAS Education Center](#).

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