

MEDIA RELEASE

CELA releases first map of Canadian airports and military bases contaminated by PFAS ‘forever chemicals’:

Extent of drinking water contamination not known

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Immediate Release

Toronto (ON) - Today the Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA) released a map of Canadian military and airport sites that are known or suspected to be contaminated with Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS). The locations came from a government response to a petition filed by CELA jointly with four environmental organizations on August 10, 2021. PFAS, also known as ‘forever chemicals’ because they persist in the environment for hundreds of years, are also found in the bodies of 99 percent of Canadians sampled.

The main sources of Canadians’ exposure to PFAS come from drinking water and food. Military bases and airports are a significant cause of water contamination because of the use of aqueous film-forming firefighting foams containing PFAS, which has been routinely used since the 1970s. PFAS are highly persistent and very mobile in water, which is why these chemicals can contaminate nearby groundwater and drinking water. There are over 12,000 PFAS chemicals in the market. Information on PFAS contaminated locations across Canada is not readily accessible and available to the public.

“CELA compiled this map to popularize awareness about PFAS and increase transparency about this chemical pollution problem”, explained Fe de Leon, Researcher at CELA. “Communities who live near these sites should be asking questions about the quality of their drinking water” she added.

“North Bay is a PFAS hotspot where the City’s drinking water has been contaminated by past Department of National Defence training activities, but none of the agencies involved – the City, DND, the local health unit, or the local office of the Ministry of the Environment – have ever held a community meeting to discuss the PFAS issues in North Bay with residents. This is a fundamental failure to provide the public with information they need to understand the risks they are being exposed to,” commented Brennain Lloyd, a spokesperson for the northeastern Ontario environmental group Northwatch and a resident of North Bay.

Health impacts associated with exposure to PFAS include developmental effects or delays in children, including low birth weight, accelerated puberty, and behavioral changes; increased risk of some cancers, including prostate, kidney, and testicular cancers; reduced ability of the body’s immune

system to fight infections, including reduced vaccine response; and increased cholesterol levels and/or risk of obesity.

On February 10, 2023 Health Canada released its Draft objective for PFAS in Canadian drinking water with a much lower level for PFAS in drinking water than they previously recommended. Health Canada acknowledges that “concentrations of PFAS in freshwater and drinking water may be higher near facilities that use large amounts of these chemicals, locations where fire-fighting foams containing PFAS were used to put out a fire, landfills and wastewater treatment plants.” Meanwhile, the United States Environmental Protection Agency proposed even much lower drinking water standards for PFAS.

“It's not just our airports and military bases that have a PFAS problem”, stated Bev Thorpe, safer chemicals expert with Clean Production Action. “Communities who live near manufacturing plants that release PFAS into the local environment or who live near sewage treatment plants discharging PFAS effluent into nearby lakes and rivers, need to be informed. Without public awareness we won't see an end to PFAS use. I applaud CELA for pushing forward this public right to know.”

"Environment Canada and Climate Change should require that the producers and users of all forms of PFAS annually report their releases and disposal of all PFAS from their facilities through Canada's public inventory known as the National Pollutant and Release Inventory," said John Jackson, co-chair of the Toxics Free Great Lakes Bi-national Network.

Other countries such as the European Union and the U.S. have more publicly available details on the sources of PFAS to the environment and are responding with proposed action plans to address PFAS.

“The released map is an essential step towards raising the awareness of Canadians about sources of PFAS exposure. Canada should urgently undertake decisions to minimize risks to people's health and environment by restricting PFAS chemicals and cleaning up contaminated sites”, says Olga Speranskaya, Co-Director at Health and Environment Justice Support (HEJSupport).

Asking for better transparency and information on location and sources of PFAS contamination is key to addressing the growing problems with PFAS in the environment. There are unsuspecting communities across the country that should be asking our government to regulate these toxic substances by banning their use and production.

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For more information or to arrange an interview, contact:

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Read the blog post: -- New Map shows location of known or suspected PFAS contamination at Canadian military bases and airports. Questions raised about drinking water quality in nearby communities.

Visit CELA's resources on PFAS <https://cela.ca/pfas-the-forever-chemicals/>