

United States Senate

December 8, 2020

The Honorable Barbara M. Barrett
Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20330-1670

Dear Secretary Barrett:

We write to you regarding the Air Force's investigation of perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) levels in groundwater wells at and surrounding Nellis Air Force Base (AFB), Nevada. As the Air Force evaluates the environmental impacts of PFOS/PFOA exposure, we request information to ensure the health and safety of servicemembers, civilian employees, and their families at Nellis AFB and surrounding communities.

As you are aware, in May 2016, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued Lifetime Health Advisory (LHA) levels for PFOA and PFOS in drinking water at 70 parts per trillion (ppt) due to their adverse effects on human health, including increased risks of cancer, reproductive and developmental issues, immune suppression, and endocrine system dysfunction. Although the EPA's LHA levels are non-regulatory, the Air Force follows them to determine if water supplies at its U.S. installations and in nearby local communities are at risk for contamination. The Air Force and Department of Defense use Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) authorities to respond to releases of PFOS/PFOA at installations.

On June 29, 2020, the Air Force notified the Nevada Congressional delegation that PFOS/PFOA levels were detected in the groundwater monitoring wells at Nellis AFB. The levels warranted an investigation of off-installation water wells. As a result, the Air Force Civil Engineer Center (AFCEC) began to sample wells used for human drinking water purposes. On October 29, 2020, the Air Force provided a secondary notification to the Nevada Congressional delegation, which announced that the Air Force had begun the multi-year Remedial Investigation (RI) phase of the CERCLA process. These notifications did not state the level or scope of PFOS/PFOA concentrations found near or on Nellis AFB, so it is still unclear if the levels are above the EPA's LHA and are placing servicemembers and their families at risk.

It is our responsibility to protect the health and safety of Nevadans. Accordingly, we request that you respond to the following questions by **December 18, 2020**:

1. How many locations at and near Nellis AFB, both on-site and off-site, are you monitoring for PFOS/PFOA? Are you currently monitoring all of these sites?
2. Can you share the PFOS/PFOA levels detected at these sites? What exact levels of PFOS/PFOA were detected to prompt Congressional notification? Is site monitoring ongoing, and if so, how frequent is it? Has the level of PFOS/PFOA changed since the Air Force first detected PFOS/PFOA levels in the groundwater monitoring wells?

3. Can you provide a list and/or map of locations where PFOS/PFOA levels currently exceed or have in the past two years exceeded the LHA levels?
4. How did the Air Force communicate to Nellis AFB servicemembers, civilian employees, their families and the effected surrounding well owners, that the RI phase had begun?
5. How will the Air Force inform Nellis AFB servicemembers, civilian employees, and their families about levels of PFOS/PFOA levels that exceed the LHA amounts? How will you notify well owners and civilians living near AFB who may be impacted?
6. How will you identify and notify Nellis AFB servicemembers, civilian employees, and their families who may have been exposed to PFOS/PFOA? How will you identify and notify well owners and civilians living near AFB who may have been exposed?
7. The Air Force's October 19, 2020, notification states, "Where concentrations of PFOS/PFOA in drinking water wells are found to be above the Lifetime HA attributable to Air Force activities, the Air Force will take immediate action to provide alternative drinking water." Has the Air Force provided safe drinking water to individuals that may have been impacted by contaminated water wells? What else is the Air Force doing to proactively protect the health and safety of servicemembers, civilian employees, and their families who may have been exposed to PFOS/PFOA?
8. What is the determination process for implementing cleanup actions during the RI? Furthermore, what criteria does the Air Force use to determine the scope of clean-up that is warranted?
9. Has the Air Force notified the State of Nevada and the affected local governments about potential contamination and future remedial clean-up processes? Has the Air Force notified any other relevant federal agencies?

Nellis AFB is home to a diverse population of servicemembers, civilian employees, and their families. Contaminated drinking wells put at risk the health of our brave men and women in the Armed Forces. It is, therefore, critical that the Air Force investigate every possibility of PFOS/PFOA exposure and immediately notify individuals living and working at or near Nellis AFB who may be at risk.

We appreciate your timely attention to this important issue and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



JACKY ROSEN
United States Senator



CATHERINE CORTEZ MASTO
United States Senator