

GAO Examines DOD Efforts to Address PFAS Contamination at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam

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The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) published a report on April 15, 2024, entitled “[Persistent Chemicals: Navy Efforts to Address PFAS at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam](#).” GAO states that it was asked to examine the Department of Defense’s (DOD) efforts to address per- and polyfluoroalkyl substance (PFAS) contamination at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam. The report describes DOD’s response to a November 2022 aqueous film-forming foam (AFFF) release at the installation; DOD processes for ongoing monitoring and long-term cleanup of PFAS at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam; and DOD’s and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) policies addressing PFAS in the environment.

GAO found that as of February 2024, DOD testing had not detected any PFAS in the active drinking water shaft at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam. GAO notes that on April 10, 2024, EPA announced a National Primary Drinking Water Regulation (NPDWR) establishing allowable levels of four parts per trillion (ppt) for certain PFAS in drinking water. Prior to this, PFAS in drinking water were not regulated at the federal level. In 2016, under the authority of the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA), EPA published health advisory levels of 70 ppt for certain PFAS in drinking water. According to GAO, since 2016, DOD has had policies in place to monitor PFAS levels in drinking water at its installations at 70 ppt. Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam regularly monitors for PFAS in its active drinking water shaft at frequencies required by DOD policy and requests by EPA and the state of Hawaii. GAO states that while PFAS have not been detected in the active drinking water shaft at the installation, levels of PFAS below 70 ppt have been detected in the installation’s two inactive drinking water shafts. These two shafts are currently not in use and according to DOD officials, the PFAS detected are not due to the November 2022 AFFF release. According to DOD policy and officials with whom GAO met, “DOD will implement and comply with the April 2024 EPA regulation.”

GAO states that PFAS contamination at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam is being addressed by DOD’s environmental restoration program. Through this program, the Navy has identified 32 sites of known or potential PFAS contamination at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam and is taking steps to assess these sites and, where appropriate, develop plans for their long-term cleanup. The Navy has prepared its final preliminary assessment and site inspection reports for the 32 sites, with recommendations for the areas in 20 of these sites to advance to the in-depth remedial investigation

phase of the environmental cleanup program. According to GAO, the remaining 12 sites were found to have no documentation of past use of AFFF or other potentially PFAS-containing products or materials.

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