Environmental Protection Network

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December 16, 2022

Radhika Fox
Assistant Administrator
Office of Water
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

RE: Lack of an Aggregate PFAS Measurement in UCMR5

Dear Assistant Administrator Fox,

As you know, the Environmental Protection Network (EPN) is an organization of over 550 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) alumni volunteering their time to protect the integrity of EPA, public health, and the environment. EPN harnesses the expertise of former EPA career staff and confirmation-level appointees from Democratic and Republican administrations to provide the unique perspective of former scientists and regulators with decades of historical knowledge and subject matter expertise.

On December 27, 2021, EPA finalized Revisions to the Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule (UCMR5) for Public Water Systems. In this final rule, the agency denied requests to include an aggregate PFAS measurement in the list of analytes for UCMR5. Public awareness of the potential for 12,000 PFAS chemicals to contaminate drinking water led many commenters on the proposed rule to ask that EPA include an aggregate PFAS measurement to determine whether the 29 individual PFAS chemicals being analyzed comprise the majority of the chemical substances containing carbon-fluorine bonds in drinking water. EPA responded that the two measurements currently available to estimate aggregate PFAS concentrations, Total Organic Fluorine (TOF) and Total Oxidizable Precursor (TOP), are not validated for UCMR5 use and that the Office of Water and Office of Research and Development are evaluating possible methods for future use.

EPN urges EPA to preserve and archive UCMR5 samples from a representative set of public water systems with known or suspected PFAS contamination in order to analyze them with an aggregate PFAS measurement as soon as the agency has identified an acceptable method. UCMR5 sampling will be done over the next three years, from January 1, 2023, until December 31, 2025. EPN recommends that EPA accelerate development of an aggregate PFAS method so that such a method is available for use as soon as possible on these archived samples. EPA should be able to use the emerging contaminant funds available under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) to pay for the archiving and analysis of these samples.

EPN further recommends that when EPA provides grants to states and territories with BIL emerging contaminant funding, the agency ensures all source water monitoring for PFAS contamination will include analyses of adsorbable organic fluorine using EPA draft method 1621 as well as analyses of the 40 individual PFAS chemicals using EPA draft method 1633. It is critical that EPA use this historic funding for emerging contaminants to address the question of whether the individual PFAS analytes comprise most of the PFAS

contamination in source waters. While EPA stated in the UCMR5 final rule that TOF was unacceptable because it was not specific to PFAS, we note that the most common sources of organofluorines are PFAS, pesticides, and pharmaceuticals, the last two of which may contain PFAS and all of which may pose significant risks in drinking water. Source water monitoring funded by the emerging contaminant grants should assess whether the fluorinated chemicals present are mostly PFAS or other potentially harmful chemicals. EPN further recommends that EPA work with the U.S. Geological Survey to include draft method 1621 whenever monitoring for individual PFAS in surface or ground waters in order to build an understanding of the prevalence of PFAS versus other fluorinated contaminants in the nation's waters.

Thank you for your attention to our recommendations. We would be happy to discuss this with you or your staff at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Michelle Roos
Executive Director
Environmental Protection Network

cc: Christopher Frey, Assistant Administrator, EPA Office of Research and Development
Jennifer McLain, Office Director, Office of Groundwater and Drinking Water, EPA Office of Water
Juan Sabater, Special Assistant, EPA Office of Water