

Durbin, Duckworth Statement on Detection of PFAS Near Scott Air Force Base

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U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL), Vice Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Defense Subcommittee, and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Ranking Member of the Senate Subcommittee with jurisdiction over the Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act, today released the following statement after the U.S. Air Force detected the two main types of Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) – PFOS and PFOA – during site inspections at Scott Air Force Base (AFB), which may be impacting off-base water wells. The Air Force is now working to determine how many water wells might be impacted, whether people are consuming the water from those wells, and measure the water for PFOS/PFOA contamination.

“The Air Force contacted our offices with a preliminary briefing on the



potential contamination of off-base water wells near Scott Air Force base. We are in direct contact with local elected officials on appropriate next steps, and we are contacting top Air Force officials to urge them to pursue a transparent and community-oriented approach to dealing with this situation.

“Unfortunately, this is not a new issue, and we have been working to alleviate this threat for years across the United States. In the last two years alone, we increased funding for PFAS-related clean-up, research, and mitigation work at and near military bases to \$483 million.

“As this situation develops, we will continue to work closely with federal, state, and local officials to ensure Congress is doing everything it can to protect the public health of all those who work at Scott AFB as well as the residents living nearby.”

The Air Force has conducted surveys for PFAS-related contamination at Scott Air Force Base in recent years, but new studies have led the Air Force to expand its investigations. According to the briefing, the Air Force Civil Engineer Center is beginning the process this month, and will complete by June 2020. The Air Force has stated that it intends to take immediate measures to protect the health of residents if further contamination is discovered.

PFAS are a class of 4,700 chemicals that are highly toxic and can be harmful at low doses. They are nicknamed “forever chemicals” as they do not breakdown easily and can accumulate in people, food, and the environment. PFAS has been linked to serious illnesses, including several types of cancer, birth defects, and thyroid disease.

Durbin and Duckworth are cosponsors of the *PFAS Action Act of 2019*, a bill to designate PFAS chemicals as hazardous substances under the *Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act*. Durbin is also a cosponsor of the *Clean Water Standards for PFAS Act of 2019*, which tasks the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) with regulating PFAS under the *Clean Water Act* and sets new standards restricting the flow of PFAS into surface waters. Duckworth led efforts on the Senate Armed Services Committee to secure provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 that direct the Department of Defense (DOD) to identify the scope of PFAS contamination on DOD installations and work to gradually eliminate the use of certain PFAS chemicals.

In April 2018, Durbin wrote to then-EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt expressing concerns of PFAS contamination on military bases and calling for a Maximum Containment Level.