



## Public Utilities

879 Morro Street, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401-2710  
805.781.7215  
[slocity.org](http://slocity.org)

March 14, 2024

The Honorable Tom Carper, Chairman

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito, Ranking Member

Committee on Environment and Public Works

United States Senate

Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Capito:

As the Committee on Environment and Public Works considers the critical need to address passive receiver liability for PFAS cleanup under CERCLA, the City of San Luis Obispo believes the committee must amend CERCLA to ensure clean water agencies like the City of San Luis Obispo are provided protections from frivolous and unwarranted litigation stemming from the imminent USEPA rule to designate PFAS as hazardous substance under CERCLA. Our request is consistent with past congressional actions that delivered such protections to preclude the use of CERCLA liability to cast a net of liability over innocent, passive receivers.

We generally support USEPA's efforts to eliminate and clean up sites contaminated by Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOA), Perfluorooctane Sulfonate (PFOS), and other PFAS. However, such efforts must recognize that utilities do not use, manufacture, or sell these compounds. Rather, chemical and product manufacturers create and sell these compounds that result in discharges to clean water systems. As part of our role in protecting public health and the environment through the treatment of wastewater influent, PFAS and other constituents are concentrated and then appropriately disposed of via wastewater effluent and/or biosolids. This process is accomplished consistent with all applicable laws, including the Clean Water Act.

USEPA has signaled that it intends to employ "enforcement discretion" and not pursue CERCLA cleanup liability against drinking water and wastewater systems related to PFAS. However, this does not protect water and wastewater systems against CERCLA claims filed by third parties, nor does it prevent polluters from entangling local agencies in CERCLA litigation or actions by employing the "joint and several" CERCLA liability regime to attempt to offload their cleanup responsibility onto our ratepayers. Without guardrails to protect water and wastewater agencies (and, by extension, the public ratepayers we serve), the CERCLA hazardous substances designation would divert limited public resources to defend against such litigation.

Moreover, subjecting ratepayers to polluter and third-party initiated CERCLA litigation directly conflicts with the "polluter pays" principle at the core of CERCLA. Ultimately, without a passive receivers exemption, CERCLA designation will result in increased water and wastewater rates nationwide, and financially burden local governments that were not responsible for the manufacture and sale of these chemicals. Congress must develop and pass liability protections to protect water systems and their ratepayers against these claims.

On behalf of the City of San Luis Obispo, we urge you to protect water and wastewater system ratepayers nationwide by providing clear and targeted liability protections for passive receivers that appropriately handle and dispose of PFAS.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. We look forward to committee action to address these concerns.

Sincerely,

Aaron Floyd

Utilities Director

City of San Luis Obispo