Miscalculated Estimates: The Imminent Financial Burden of EPA's 2024 PFAS Maximum Contaminant Levels

By Brian D. Gross

January 6, 2025

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are synthetic chemicals used in a wide range of consumer products since 1947, known for their strong carbon-fluorine bonds. These bonds make PFAS resistant to breakdown, earning them the nickname “forever chemicals” and causing them to bioaccumulate in humans and animals. While the health impacts of PFAS remain under rigorous study, it is believed that exposure to these chemicals at certain levels may be associated with several adverse health effects, including certain cancers, thyroid disease, high cholesterol, ulcerative colitis and pregnancy-induced hypertension.

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) set enforceable Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) for six PFAS chemicals in drinking water in April 2024. These MCLs are based on current detection technology and regulate a mixture of PFAS using a Hazard Index. Public water systems are allotted 3 years (by 2027) to complete initial monitoring for PFAS and have 5 years (by 2029) to comply with the drinking water standards if monitoring reveals PFAS concentrations exceed the MCLs. EPA estimated an aggregate total of $1.548 billion in annual compliance costs for the estimated 4,100 to 6,700 affected water systems. Other industry groups, such as the American Water Works Association (AWWA), have produced higher estimates, ranging from $2.5 to $3.2 billion annually, and up to $30.7 billion in capital costs. This estimate does not include all water systems, which could push total costs much higher.

High concentrations of certain PFAS in drinking water may pose adverse health risks that justify regulatory action by EPA. Industry groups argue, however, that EPA's final Rule is financially irresponsible, practically infeasible, and is not based on sound science and procedure. The disparity in estimated costs from EPA and these independent analyses reinforce concern over the legitimacy of EPA estimates and, as a result, the feasibility of the new Rule. To avoid this impending financial burden, it is anticipated that the court will vacate the Rule and require an updated version that accurately and comprehensively assesses costs versus benefits in accordance with the Safe Drinking Water Act.

Download the full article below to learn more about navigating and complying with these complex new regulations.

MG+M Intern Tyler Morse is a contributing author of this article.

Attorney Advertising. This material is for general informational purposes only and does not represent our advice as to any particular set of facts; nor does it represent any undertaking to keep recipients advised of all legal developments. Prior results do not guarantee a similar outcome. © 2026 MG+M The Law Firm