

What Does a Successful Risk Communication Strategy for PFAS Sites Look Like?

Moderator

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Panelists

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PFAS pose some challenges and perhaps unique difficulties for effective risk communication, particularly with respect to anticipated health effects and perceived risk. To date there are no unequivocally established human health risks, however current research indicates potential health impacts associated with cancer, developmental delays, and altered immunologic responsiveness. Furthermore, regulatory standards and policies may differ between federal and state requirements, creating a sense of uncertainty and alarm among public stakeholders. These factors combined have resulted in prudent and precautionary mitigation practices to reduce exposures among some remediation practitioners alongside requests from the public to eliminate the use of PFAS products and cleanup of all PFAS to stringent levels. The panel will discuss the importance of taking a step back and developing a comprehensive risk communication plan that considers these factors, as well as the heterogeneity of the community, site-specific risk perception factors, and identifies tools for use by any remediation practitioner and third party (academic institution) to address risk communication challenges. A successful communication plan guides practitioners in defining site-specific engagement goals and stakeholder context first, followed by determining the relevance and applicability of available tools based on established goals, community demographics and concerns. The panel will discuss tools to address knowledge gaps and misinformation, such as an "active centralized information repository" and "understanding PFOA webinar" for the general public as well as, tools (message map, vision board, community based participatory research) to identify and integrate stakeholder concerns into public outreach strategies.