

Audit shows US DoD isn't protecting service members from toxic 'forever chemicals'

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(HealthDay)—The U.S. Department of Defense isn't doing enough to

guard service members against exposure to so-called "forever chemicals" associated with a range of health problems, the department's inspector general said Tuesday.

The internal audit also noted that the department is falling short on tracking the health effects from exposure to the toxic compounds, called perfluoroalkyl and [polyfluoroalkyl substances](#) (PFAS), at military installations, the *Associated Press* reported.

The substances are linked to some cancers, weakened immune systems and low birth weight.

While the Pentagon has tried to find and clean up groundwater contaminated with [firefighting foam](#) containing PFAS, it's dragged its feet on dealing with other sources of the chemicals as required by Congress, the *AP* said.

Also, the [inspector general](#) said the Defense Department (DoD) has no plan to track and analyze the results of military firefighters' blood tests for PFAS on a department-wide basis, the *AP* reported.

The Pentagon "is missing an opportunity to capture comprehensive PFAS exposure data for DoD firefighters to be used for [risk management](#), including future studies to assess significant long-term [health effects](#) relating to PFAS," according to the audit.

In the report, two assistant secretaries of defense largely agreed with the findings and promised to address them, but the inspector general said the case will remain open until its recommendations are followed, the *AP* reported.

"This inspector general's report confirms that the Defense Department must urgently do more to protect service members and their families

from PFAS chemicals," Rep. Dan Kildee, co-chairman of the Congressional PFAS Task Force, said Tuesday.

A Pentagon spokesperson had no immediate comment about the inspector general's findings, the *AP* reported.

PFAS—which are called "forever chemicals" because they don't break down in the environment—have been found in groundwater on or near more than 300 military bases, according to the nonprofit Environmental Working Group.

"Some of highest [PFAS] detections anywhere in the world been found in groundwater" at military installations, Scott Faber, the Environmental Working Group's senior vice president for government affairs, told the *AP*.

That means personnel "were drinking extraordinarily polluted water for much longer than they should have been, in violation of the department's own policies," Faber added.

Along with firefighting foams, PFAS are used in numerous products, including nonstick cookware, cosmetics, grease-resistant food packaging and water-repellent sports gear, the *AP* reported.

More information: Visit the Environmental Protection Agency for more on [PFAS](#).

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