

PFAS Communications Toolkit

How To Plan for Communicating about PFAS Results

It's never too early to start building your community's awareness of PFAS. At some point, your community is likely to read about PFAS in the news. Local water authorities have the opportunity to communicate about PFAS and lay the groundwork for discussion. Proactively reaching out to the media, using partners, hosting open houses, and using your social media channels are great ways to do this. The following are communications tactics you could consider when planning how to communicate with your community.

1. **Identify Spokesperson(s)** – Your utility or local officials may get requests for interviews from the media and/or presentations from your governing board. Identify who will be your spokesperson. Depending on your size, you may need more than one. Make sure these individuals are likeable, trustworthy, credible, and comfortable speaking in front of groups.
2. **Messages** – Get the appropriate team together (leadership, communications, operations, legal, etc.) to determine what your messages about PFAS will be. Use EPA's messages as needed, but also develop your own messages around what you are doing. Brainstorm the questions you may receive from customers, elected officials, and the media and develop answers to them. You can use EPA's PFAS [Q&A](#) as a starting point. Post these at your website and train customer-facing staff on your messages and how to talk about PFAS. You can even create a presentation about what you know and are doing about PFAS.
3. **Website** - Make sure you have a page about PFAS at your website and it's linked from your home page. The page should talk about what they are, where they come from, and what you, as a utility, are doing about it now and plans for the future.
4. **Media** - Reach out to the local media and ask to talk to them about PFAS. This gives you a chance to frame the messaging before someone else does. See Media Tips below for more information.
5. **Partners** - Identify organizations and individuals in your service area who are trusted sources of information and influential. This may be faith-based leaders, elected officials, public health professionals, or educational professionals. Talk to them about PFAS and ask them to share information with their networks. Provide talking points using EPA's information ([linked](#)).

6. **Host Public Meetings or Open Houses** - Plan community meetings or open houses to share information about PFAS. Consider setting up tables in a large meeting room with subject matter experts. Or host virtual information sessions for customers and community members.

7. **Social Media** – See our recommended post topics below for ideas to get you started and download and use EPA’s videos (linked) and infographics (linked).

Risk Communications Resources - EPA will be offering webinars about the rule to help you understand what is required and to answer important questions. Be sure to have customer-facing staff attend one of the sessions.

Remember that you are not alone. This announcement will impact many water systems all over the country. Reach out to your allies to share advice; seek partnerships from trusted sources in your community; and consult the information in this toolkit and at EPA’s website.

Ongoing Communications. Communications is an on-going activity. You are never done. So, keep the information at your website; continue to tell your story of how you are handling PFAS; and keep information about PFAS in your monthly content calendar for social media.

Media Tips

1. Don’t Wait

Don’t wait for the local media to contact you about PFAS. Without your input, they may have already decided how to present the story and you may find yourself in a defensive position. If you contact them first, you can help frame the conversation about PFAS for your service area.

2. Plan Your Pitch

Before you contact the media, plan your story around PFAS. Gather the leaders in your office from operations, engineering, the laboratory, communications, customer service and legal to talk through what is the story you want to tell around PFAS. Make sure you share this information with your employees and governing board first. This info could include:

- Monitoring or sampling you have done or plan to do

- Planned investments you will make to upgrade treatment or identify alternative water sources, the cost to customers, and the timing for completion
- Any efforts you've made or plan to make to take advantage of state or federal funding to keep costs down.
- Information on point-of-use filters for customers

3. Select Your Spokesperson

Decide who among your staff will be the lead face of the story for interviews. This may be the utility leader or a local government official. Pick a person who is trusted, knowledgeable, and able to appear natural and calm on camera.

Prepare your spokesperson for the media interview by running through with them the main points you want to make in the interview and think through what questions you may receive so you are prepared to answer them. Recorded role playing with some of the anticipated questions is a good way to practice.

4. Reach the Right Person

Make sure you have researched the media outlets in your area well enough to know the right people to reach out to. Consider those who have written about your utility before, or journalists who have covered public health, local issues, or the environment.

5. This is not a news release

You are not announcing anything – you are pitching a story. So, you don't need a news release – but you do need a synopsis of the story for an email to the reporter. Keep it brief and make sure the subject line is compelling.

6. Bring Materials

Pull together imagery, video and infographics that can help tell the story for you. The more you can offer the media, the more likely they will be to take on the story.

Social Media Posts

Many of your customers get their news and information from social media. As a water utility, you are the local, trusted source for any information pertaining to water; as such, EPA suggests the following types of posts about PFAS for your social media accounts. Remember that you probably need to post on each topic several times to ensure your audience sees the post.

- **What are PFAS?**

- In EPA's toolkit, EPA has explainer videos, graphics, and messaging you can use to explain what PFAS are, where they come from, and how people become exposed, including through their drinking water.
- **We have a scheduled plan of action**
 - Provide information that assures your customers you are working toward complying with the PFAS drinking water rule. Explain what you have been doing and plan to do. For example, when you have them, talk about your sampling plan, capital improvement plan to add treatment, or applications for federal funding to help lower costs for customers.
- **Taking steps to keep the water safe**
 - Create posts that show, not just tell, what you are doing to keep the water safe. Show workers taking samples; lab analysts testing the water; operators working in the treatment plant. Share your data and your record of delivering safe drinking water.
- **Here's what you can do**
 - Give your customers some guidance on what they can do. EPA has a fact sheet and a website (links in the toolkit) that provide some steps your customers can take if they are worried about PFAS.
- **What to know about filters and bottled water**
 - Your customers will have questions about filters and bottled water, so include this messaging in your social media. Information is available on filters [for PFAS](#) that people can use in their homes, if they wish to do so.
- **Where to learn more about PFAS**
 - Make sure you provide EPA's website for more information on PFAS (linked).