

SENATOR GILLIBRAND REQUESTS CDC TO PROACTIVELY CONDUCT PUBLIC HEALTH ASSESSMENT OF SAINT-GOBAIN SITE IN HOOSICK FALLS

Public Health Assessment Would Help Federal Agencies Develop a Public Health Action Plan to Address Environmental Crisis Caused by PFOA

September 20, 2016--Washington, D.C. – U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), a member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, today sent a letter urging the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to use its authority to immediately conduct a public health assessment of the Saint-Gobain site in Hoosick Falls and surrounding communities. A public health assessment would allow the CDC to do the comprehensive review necessary to develop a public health action plan to help address this environmental crisis.

“When you and I visited Hoosick Falls in July 2016, we heard directly from residents about how PFOA exposure has affected their lives and the grave concerns these families have about their future, especially with regard to health-related effects,” **Senator Gillibrand wrote in the letter.** “The results of blood tests have shown that there are residents of the Village of Hoosick Falls with levels of PFOA in their bloodstream as much as 100 or 200 times greater than that of the general U.S. population. I request that the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) proactively initiate a public health assessment of the Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics site and the surrounding affected communities as soon as possible.”

Senator Gillibrand has been urging the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, as well as the EPA, CDC, and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to take action to address the situation in Hoosick Falls, Hoosick, Petersburg, and other nearby, affected communities.

In May 2016, Senator Gillibrand urged the EPA to expedite the cleanup of Hoosick Falls by designating it as a federal Superfund site. Senator Gillibrand also sent a letter to Senator James Inhofe, Chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, in February 2016 requesting that the committee hold a hearing to examine the effects of PFOA on drinking water in the United States. In June 2016, Senator Gillibrand called on the EPA to use the new authority provided by the recently reformed Toxic Substances Control Act to determine if PFOA should be restricted or banned at the federal level. She also asked the NIH and the CDC to do all they can to provide information and assistance to the residents of Hoosick Falls, Hoosick, and Petersburg regarding the health effects of PFOA exposure.

Senator Gillibrand wrote to the Directors of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences at NIH and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry at CDC in July 2016 urging the agencies to prioritize research into the health effects of PFOA exposure and asking the agencies to outline the resources and legislative authority they need to conduct and support research to fill in the current gaps in our understanding of the health effects of PFOA.

Earlier this month, Senator Gillibrand introduced legislation that would require the EPA to expand water testing for unregulated drinking water contaminants to all public water supplies. Currently, the EPA is only required to test for unregulated contaminants in water systems serving over 10,000 people.

The full text of the letter is below:

Dear Director Breyse,

Thank you for your commitment to addressing the public health concerns related to the emerging problem of perfluoroalkyl substance (PFAS) contamination in New York State and across the country. Earlier this month, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed adding the Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics site in Hoosick Falls, New York, to the federal Superfund National Priorities List (NPL) of the country's most hazardous waste sites due to the contamination of the groundwater supplying the village's public water supply wells with the chemical compound perfluorooctanoic acid, commonly known as PFOA. I am writing to you today to request that the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) use its authority to conduct a public health assessment of the Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics site and the surrounding affected communities where elevated levels of PFOA have been confirmed, to develop a public health action plan that identifies next steps for responding to this crisis.

As you know, studies indicate that exposure to PFOA over certain levels may result in adverse health effects, including high cholesterol, high blood pressure, kidney cancer, testicular cancer, liver damage, low birth weight, immune system impacts, and other serious health effects. However, these health effects are not well understood, and more research is needed to clarify and expand upon current research findings. In previous correspondence, I have asked the National Center for Environmental Health and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (NCEH/ATSDR) at the CDC to prioritize this research, and I look forward to continuing to work with you to determine what resources are needed to conduct this research.

When you and I visited Hoosick Falls in July 2016, we heard directly from residents about how PFOA exposure has affected their lives and the grave concerns these families have about their future, especially with regard to health-related effects. The results of blood tests have shown that there are residents of the Village of Hoosick Falls with levels of PFOA in their bloodstream as much as 100 or 200 times greater than that of the general U.S. population. All age groups have been affected, from infants to senior citizens. The New York State Department of Health is currently conducting an investigation to determine if there are elevated rates of cancer among residents of the Village of Hoosick Falls based on cancer diagnoses from 1995 through 2012.

I strongly support the EPA's proposal to add the Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics site to the NPL. The EPA's public comment period on the proposal will close on November 8, 2016, after which the EPA will issue a final NPL designation. Should the Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics Site be added to the NPL, this designation would make the site eligible for funding to conduct long-term cleanup. It would also require ATSDR to conduct a public health assessment. However, ATSDR has the authority to proactively conduct a public health assessment of a site when petitioned to do so by concerned citizens.

Given the clear indication from the EPA that the PFOA contamination in Hoosick Falls rises to the level of NPL consideration, as well as the public health concerns associated with the level of PFOA contamination in the Hoosick area and the PFOA blood levels among Hoosick Falls residents, I request that ATSDR proactively initiate a public health assessment of the Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics site and the surrounding affected communities as soon as possible. This would enable ATSDR to conduct a comprehensive review of available environmental and biomonitoring data, including data specific to this site and the surrounding communities; work with community members, state and local government entities, and the responsible parties; and ultimately develop a public health action plan that outlines appropriate next steps for addressing this crisis and better understanding potential health effects.

Sincerely,

Kirsten Gillibrand

United States Senator