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Happy Easter!



Records: New Hope officers had lapsed Taser training

By Jo Ciavaglia
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A veteran New Hope police officer who shot and wounded a Pipersville man after confusing his stun gun with his Glock 22, had not been re-certified in the use of his police-issued Taser since at least 2016, according to a review of records obtained by this news organization.

Cpl. Matt Zimmerman, 65, who retired April 10, also was not the only department officer without a current Taser certification, which goes against a 2007 internal policy and the device manufacturer's recommendations.

The New Hope police officer responsible for the department's re-training has an instructor certification that expired last year.

Nine of the 10 other officers employed by the borough at the time of the March 3 shooting also had not been re-certified in Taser use since at least 2016, according to records obtained through a Right to Know request. The

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A PASSOVER REFLECTION

Friedman: Judaism is a part of me

UNWELL WATER

TAKING ITS TOLL



Steven Vernik walks through the home he owns in the Hartsville section of Warwick. His family moved from the home upon learning their private drinking water well was contaminated with high levels of PFAS. The family now lives in Buckingham while they try to sell the Hartsville property. (WILLIAM THOMAS CAIN / CORRESPONDENT)

It's been five years since firefighting chemicals were first discovered in drinking water sources serving tens of thousands of residents along the Bucks and Montgomery County line. But problems persist as the chemicals continue to sit in soil and leak off area military bases, impacting municipal finances, water rates, private well owners, and even the reputation and credit ratings of impacted townships.

State lawmakers and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection say they have plans to assist the area, and potentially force the military to do more to clean the chemicals up.

But nothing is certain, and neither time nor the politics in Harrisburg appear to be on their side.

Read the latest in our ongoing coverage:

- Local homeowners, officials deal with ramifications of contamination | **A17**
- EPA inaction leaves state stumbling | **A19**

About this series

Since 2014, 22 public wells and about 200 private wells have been shut down by contamination from perfluorooctanoic acid, or PFOA, and perfluorooctane sulfonate, or PFOS. Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst is investigating the extent of contamination there, while a trio of current and former military bases in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, are thought to be the source of the taint there.

Reporters Kyle Bagenstose and Jenny Wagner have been investigating and writing extensively on the topic, telling the stories of local people who believe they've been sickened by the chemicals, speaking with health experts on the potential toxicity of the chemicals, and examining the actions taken by local, state and federal agencies as they address the contamination.

For complete coverage of this issue, visit buckscountycourier-times.com/unwellwater.

Mueller, Barr dispute drove end of probe

By Devlin Barrett and Matt Zapposky
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — For nearly two years, the public, Congress and the White House waited to learn if special counsel Robert Mueller would find that President Donald Trump had committed crimes. When the answer was finally revealed, it turned out Mueller didn't think that was his job at all.

The special counsel ended his investigation last month, pointedly choosing not to reach a conclusion about whether the president had obstructed justice.

In a report of its findings,



Attorney General William Barr speaks about the release of a redacted version of special counsel Robert Mueller's report during a news conference, Thursday at the Department of Justice in Washington. (PATRICK SEMANSKY/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS)

Mueller's team said that choice was driven in large part by a long-standing legal opinion at the Justice

Department's Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) that a sitting president should not be indicted, even if the charges remained sealed.

Mueller's team concluded that also meant they could not accuse the president of a crime, even in secret internal documents, the report said.

That move surprised everyone, including Attorney General William Barr and his senior advisers, according to current and former Justice Department officials. When Mueller presented his findings without reaching a decision about the president, Barr reviewed the evidence

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strength

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Steven Vernik stands in the Hartsville home his family left after learning their private drinking water well was contaminated with high levels of PFAS. The family now lives in Buckingham while they try to sell the Hartsville property. [WILLIAM THOMAS CAIN / CORRESPONDENT]

Five years after discovery, PFAS concerns continue

By Kyle Bagenstose and Jenny Wagner
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Steve Vernik's house sits empty. It's gone unsold for months, a pariah on the real estate market.

There's little doubt in his mind it's because of the toxic chemicals in his drinking water, bubbling up from a private well on the property, located at the southern tip of Warwick. After drinking bottled water for more than two years and waiting for someone to take responsibility for the contamination, he gave up and moved his family seven months ago to a new home, five miles away.

A second mortgage is the price they pay for peace of mind.

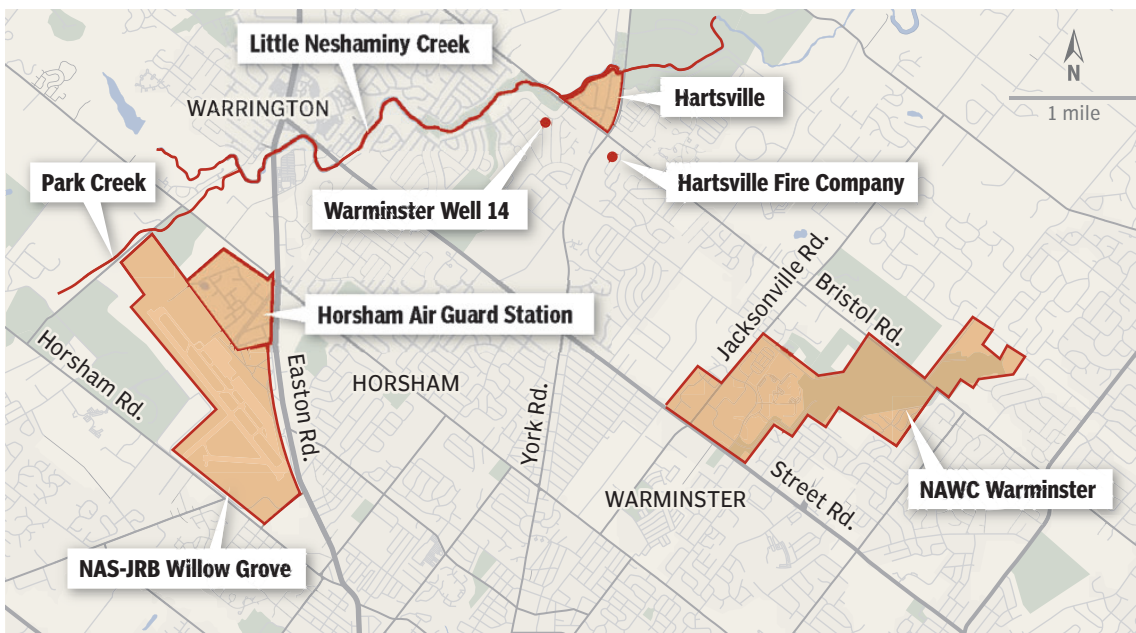
"This is one of the biggest financial hits I ever would have imagined I'd take in my life," Vernik said. "Paying two mortgages and having to get a swing loan to get out of here, and all these other things, just brought me down to my knees in a sense. At the same time, I can't risk my family's health."

Vernik personifies the real-world costs of a chemical contamination that continues to fester, five years after it was first discovered along the border of Bucks and Montgomery counties. The source, or at least the largest known source, is a trio of current and former military bases in Warminster and Horsham, where firefighting chemicals called per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) were used for decades.

By any normal measure, the military's response to the contamination has been substantial. The Navy says it has spent \$58 million, \$35 million of which was used to filter or provide alternative water for all drinking water sources that exceeded a 70 parts per trillion (ppt) safety limit recommended by the Environmental Protection

Areas of continuing concern for contamination

Five years after firefighting chemicals were first discovered in area drinking water, local officials and residents remain concerned that PFAS are leaving the former NAS-JRB Willow Grove and Horsham Air Guard Station and entering Park Creek. The waterway then empties into the Little Neshaminy Creek, which could be impacting downstream water supplies such as Warminster's Well 14 and private wells in Hartsville.



Source: maps4news.com/©HERE GATEHOUSE MEDIA

Agency. That includes 15 public water wells in Warminster, Warrington and Horsham, along with one supply well on the Horsham Air Guard Station and about 250 private residential wells.

The Navy also has poured \$23 million into environmental testing and studies, and has taken some interim measures to try and stop the chemicals from leaving the former Naval Air Station-Joint Reserve Base Willow Grove and Naval Air Warfare Center Warminster. The Air National Guard has also spent millions dealing with contamination at the Horsham base.

But PFAS aren't normal chemicals. Synthetically engineered to knock down fuel fires, they're extremely difficult to get rid of. They stick around for decades, traveling farther and wider than expected, and accumulate inside the bodies of those who consume them.

Yet the Department of Defense, both locally and at other PFAS sites across the country, has largely kept its wallet closed for any situations

that don't involve clear cut drinking water exposures above the EPA's safety limit. After several states created regulations to force the military to do more, including increased environmental cleanup, the military pushed back by filing lawsuits or saying it had legal immunity from state orders.

Local officials such as Chris Crockett, chief environmental officer with private water utility Aqua PA, say that approach means PFAS problems are slipping through the cracks in Pennsylvania.

"If you don't stop it at the source, this stuff goes everywhere," Crockett said. "It goes into the ground, somebody pulls it out in their private well, it ultimately makes it down to the next community's wastewater discharge, which then makes it into a stream, which then makes into the next drinking water intake of the next community. So we really want to contain this so it stops hopping all around."

Crockett is anxiously awaiting a study announced two years ago by the Navy and

U.S. Geological Survey to analyze the area's waterways and establish how far PFAS had traveled from the bases. By conducting its own PFAS sampling, Crockett says Aqua already believes the chemicals are traveling 22 miles through a network of streams and creeks to a drinking water intake along the Neshaminy Creek in Middletown. A treatment plant there processes 11 million gallons a day to serve to 38,000 Aqua drinking water customers.

Prior to treatment, the chemicals from the Neshaminy reached as high as 67 ppt in July 2017, just below the EPA health limit.

"We know that it lasts a century in the environment," Crockett said. "In the time it takes to go 22 miles, nothing is going to happen to it."

The company has also been hit with high PFAS levels in groundwater wells in Hatboro, which neighbors Horsham, and even in Upper Dublin, some five miles away from the nearest base, with no obvious connections through surface waterways.

"It's hard to tell what the influence was," of the bases, Crockett said. "How far would that move in 50 years? It's something we wish we had that information from USGS to see."

In an email, USGS hydrologist Lisa Senior said that the agency expects to release preliminary results of the study by the end of 2019.

"This work is projected to continue for some time, with additional data, analyses, and findings to come," Senior said. "The USGS activities do not include measurement of PFAS concentrations in groundwater or streams, which are being done by others."

Vernik's home is closer to the contamination than Aqua's supplies, just about three miles from both the Horsham and Warminster bases. But that's still distance enough to also be on the outside looking in. The military has not claimed responsibility for PFAS contamination in his Hartsville neighborhood, where six other homes also exceeded the EPA's health advisory.

The military has instead pointed to the nearby Hartsville Fire Station, suggesting firefighting foams containing the chemicals may have been used there. The EPA has sampled the property's soil, and according to results obtained by this news organization, found perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS), the primary PFAS in firefighting foams, at 47 and 29 parts per billion in two areas.

Those levels are above typical PFOS soil levels of about 1 ppb, but are well below levels often seen in areas of heavy firefighting foam use, which can reach into the thousands of ppb. According to an environmental report from the Willow Grove base last year, soil levels reached as high as 98,000 ppb for PFOS near a former fire and rescue building off Route 611, more than 2,000 times higher than the levels found in Hartsville.

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PFAS

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In an email sent by Rick Rogers, an associate director for drinking water in the EPA's regional offices, and obtained by this news organization, Rogers called the Hartsville results "inconclusive," because the agency does not have a firm grasp on how PFOS moves from soil to groundwater. Terri White, the EPA's regional deputy director for communications, told this news organization the EPA was scheduled to test groundwater below the fire station this month to learn more.

"EPA has not made a determination because there is insufficient data. EPA is looking into all potential sources," White wrote.

State Sen. Maria Collett, D-12, of Lower Gwynedd, is not impressed with anyone involved, adding she believes the EPA also shares blame for not putting its foot down.

"That's where we're at, letters going back and forth with blame-shifting and finger-pointing, instead of anyone actually taking responsibility," Collett said.

Horsham in limbo

Problems remain even at the epicenter of the contamination.

William Walker, township manager of Horsham, says collateral damage from the issue is extensive. Before the PFAS crisis hit, the township was slated to receive 860 acres of the former Willow Grove base from the Navy. In 2012, the township formed the Horsham Land Redevelopment Authority to map out plans for the unprecedented turnover of land, which is larger than all of the township's existing open space combined.

Plans call for housing, a school, a festival ground, a hotel and office park, and even a town center, netting as much as \$4.7 million in new municipal taxes, which would represent a 22% increase over the town's current annual revenue of \$22 million.

But all that was put on hold when the PFAS issue broke open in 2014. Last year, the Navy excavated about 3,000 tons of the most highly contaminated soil from the former base and tried to dispose of it, but was turned down by a New Jersey landfill. As of late winter, the soil sat in piles under a tarp on the base, as the Navy searched for a hazardous waste landfill to take it, even though the chemicals remain unregulated.

Horsham is in no hurry to make contaminated soil its problem.

"Redevelopment is really important to us," Walker said. "But we're not going to move forward and accept any land until we know it's clean ... we're not going to sacrifice public health for development."

The problems go even deeper, striking at the heart of Horsham as a desirable, prospering community. In 2011, the township was named one of the top 100 places to live in America by CNN Money Magazine, and climbed into the top 50 in 2013.

The following year, just as the contamination was discovered, Horsham was also named one of the top places to buy a home in Pennsylvania and among the "Top 10 Cities on the Rise" in the state by a prominent personal finance website.

Now, Walker says, raters like CNN have moved on.

"The last time we talked with them they had said, 'You have an issue in your town and that's the base,'" Walker said. "Nothing's happening."

Credit rating agency Moody's has taken notice, too. While the town has kept its Aa1 credit rating, the second highest, "Moody tells us we



The military has not claimed responsibility for PFAS contamination in Hartsville, where a half-dozen homes have exceeded the EPA's health advisory for the chemicals. It instead has suggested firefighting foams containing the chemicals may have been used by the Hartsville Fire Station. Soil levels of PFOS, the primary PFAS chemical found in foams, is higher at the station's property than naturally found, but lower than areas where heavy foam use is known to have occurred. [FILE]



Horsham Township Manager Bill Walker speaks during a meeting on water quality issues held in the township in 2016. [CHLOE ELMER / FILE]

would have triple 'A' if the base wasn't just sitting there," Walker said.

There are other fiscal impacts for the area. Concerned that its customers could have been drinking and building up PFAS in their bodies for decades, and skeptical of the EPA's 70 ppt advisory as other scientists called for lower standards, the Horsham Water and Sewer Authority approved a plan in 2016 to remove the chemicals entirely from its water supply.

With the Navy only agreeing to buy filters for five wells that exceed 70 ppt, the authority decided to pay its own way to filter five more and also buy replacement water from the neighboring North Wales Water Authority. In 2016, Horsham was awarded a \$10 million, taxpayer-funded state grant to help with costs, but still faces about \$1.2 million in annual costs to keep the water clean of any PFAS, according to business manager Tina O'Rourke.

The plan also has a troubling downside. At the heart of contamination on the former Willow Grove base, groundwater testing has shown PFAS in excess of 300,000 ppt, or more than 4,000 times the EPA advisory level for drinking water. Without on-site cleanup or pumping, O'Rourke worries the authority's wells, located off the bases, will increasingly draw the contaminated plume outward and under the community's feet.

"Are we pulling that water?" O'Rourke asked during a recent interview. "A concern of mine

would be how quickly they could start to actually perform some kind of remediation."

Exacerbating the problem is that military records and accounting appear to show about 140 private well owners in the impacted communities have PFAS in their wells between 40 and 70 ppt. That means their water is slightly below the EPA advisory, but that the military won't pay to hook their homes into the nearest public water system.

In Warminster, municipal authority manager Tim Hagey says costs have also added up after the utility implemented its own zero-tolerance plan for the chemicals. Originally, the Navy verbally agreed to pay for filtration on six public water wells, Hagey said, but later reneged on two that are located not far from Vernik's home in Hartsville, after the wells dropped below 70 ppt.

The authority initially estimated that putting filters on all its remaining wells would add up to \$18 million in costs. Hagey says the authority is first piloting a study using synthetic resin filters in place of carbon, which would be more economical. How much Warminster will ultimately pay is yet to be determined.

"We're hoping to spend significantly less than that, if we're permitted to use resin only," Hagey said.

Limited cleanup occurring

While military officials say robust cleanup efforts can't

begin until the contamination is studied further, they have taken some efforts to stem the flow of PFAS from the bases.

A primary point of interest is contaminated water leaving the northern part of the Air Guard Station and former Willow Grove base, which environmental testing has shown dumps thousands of parts per trillion of PFAS into Park Creek. The waterway then connects to the Little Neshaminy Creek, which runs right by Hartsville on its way to the main Neshaminy. Municipal officials say there's some indication the Little Neshaminy might leak PFAS into the groundwater near Hartsville, potentially impacting homes like Vernik's. Asked about the possibility, Navy officials referred questions to the USGS.

In 2017, the Navy capped artesian wells near the northern boundary of Willow Grove and attempted to seal up nearby stormwater outfalls. Both the Navy and Air National Guard have expanded retention basins in the area, and the Air Guard even contracted with the Warminster authority to install a temporary treatment system to filter water leaving the base.

Both bases have also used cameras to inspect their sewer lines to identify and repair areas where contaminated groundwater could be infiltrating. At the Willow Grove base, the Navy is beginning

a pilot study of a groundwater treatment system, and at the former Warminster base, it added carbon to an existing groundwater treatment system to catch PFAS.

Municipal officials give them some credit, with Walker saying he thinks the military's local environmental managers are hamstrung by national policies. He says they've even stuck their necks out to take actions like the soil removal.

"DOD didn't tell them to do that. EPA didn't tell them to do that," Walker said of the efforts of the bases' local managers. "I think where a lot of the frustration comes from, is Washington and Harrisburg."

Yet municipal officials also say the work to date is a proverbial drop in the bucket.

For example, the Air Guard admits its water filter is quickly overwhelmed during storms, and that contaminated groundwater leaks back into the runoff after leaving the base. The Navy's pilot filter will pump just 20 gallons a minute, according to O'Rourke, and Hagey said the Navy's groundwater treatment at the Warminster base adds up to only about 200,000 gallons per day, equal to just one of his authority's public wells.

Officials say the efforts to cap wells and outfalls mean the PFAS contamination is just pushed back beneath the surface, its destination unknown.

"The water has to go somewhere," Crockett said. "If it isn't going to the creek, where is it going?"

For its part, the Navy defended its activities, saying it has worked with state and federal regulators and has complied with applicable laws. Officials from the Air National Guard did not respond to an inquiry by deadline.

"The Navy takes this responsibility seriously and wants to ensure that it completes this action correctly," Willie Lin, environmental coordinator for the Navy, wrote in an email. "The Navy believes it has implemented the base cleanup effort with an appropriate level of care and concern for all stakeholders, using all available technologies without established regulatory cleanup standards."

For all his troubles, Vernik empathizes with the military on the scope of the PFAS

PA lawmakers, regulators struggle to address chemical contamination

By Kyle Bagenstose and Jenny Wagner

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As state environmental regulators across the country begin battling the U.S. military over firefighting chemical contamination within their borders, Pennsylvania is struggling to even get its own strategy off the ground after decades of reliance on the Environmental Protection Agency to set safety standards.

The state's primary environmental regulator, the Department of Environmental Protection, has announced efforts to set drinking water and environmental standards, but is in many ways building the airplane as it flies. And in the General Assembly, lawmakers have so far been unsuccessful in winning enough political support to pass laws that would sidestep the DEP, and there are no signs that the two arms of government are coordinating in any meaningful way.

Meanwhile, per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, continue to slip off bases in Bucks and Montgomery counties, reaching wildlife and humans exposed through drinking water. Some studies have linked PFAS to a variety of health effects, including high cholesterol, ulcerative colitis, reproductive and developmental issues, and some cancers.

Those frustrated by the efforts, such as state Rep. Todd Stephens, R-151, of Horsham, lay the blame at the feet of the EPA, which has not yet acted to create standards for the chemicals five years after they were first discovered in the drinking water of millions of Americans during a nationwide testing program.

"I've been asking the bureaucrats at the EPA for years to address the issue, and they haven't," Stephens said.

But Stephens is also well-attuned to the difficulties of tackling PFAS in Harrisburg. For the past several years, legislation he and colleagues introduced to tackle PFAS contamination have all been shot down by opposing interests.

For its part, the EPA has said it is working on a robust response to the issue. Earlier this year, the agency revealed a PFAS Action Plan, through which administrator Andrew Wheeler says he intends to establish a nationwide drinking water limit for the chemicals and is considering other regulations, such as listing PFAS as hazardous substances under the Superfund program. Asked to comment on the ongoing struggles of states like Pennsylvania, agency spokeswoman Andrea Drinkard said the EPA is moving through the process "as expeditiously as possible."

"In the interim, the agency intends to support states as



State Rep. Todd Stephens, R-151 of Horsham, center, joins U.S. Reps. Brendaon Boyle and Mike Fitzpatrick at a press conference in June outside Horsham Air Guard Station calling for EPA to regulate PFAS chemicals. Stephens criticizes the EPA for not yet acting to create standards for the chemicals five years after they were first discovered in the drinking water of millions of Americans during a nationwide testing program. [KYLE BAGENSTOSE / FILE]

Read more online

This news organization partnered with the Wisconsin State Journal of Madison, Wisconsin, and the Daily News-Miner of Fairbanks, Alaska, to compare how diverse states across the country are struggling to respond to PFAS issues. Read our expanded collaboration online at gatehousenews.com/unwellwater/states/site/buckscountycourier-times.com.

we prioritize prevention and remediation programs to support local communities currently facing PFAS challenges," Drinkard added. "EPA supports states and tribes as they take appropriate actions to address PFAS in their communities."

In Pennsylvania, lawmakers and the DEP agree they can't afford to wait for the EPA to act. But there is little agreement around what exactly to do and how quickly to do it.

First-term state Sen. Maria Collett, D-12, of Lower Gwynedd, said she will imminently introduce a pair of bills in the state legislature. The first would set a state drinking water standard for four kinds of PFAS at 10 parts per trillion (10 ppt), which is a fraction of an EPA health advisory level of 70 ppt for perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS).

The second bill would add PFAS to the state's Hazardous Sites Cleanup Act, while also permitting the governor to declare an emergency, similar to a natural disaster such as a flood, for water sources impacted by PFAS above 10 ppt. The governor could then establish drinking water or cleanup standards for the affected area, which could allow a more narrow approach than a state-wide regulation.

"The real vulnerability is for the people that have been living with this exposure in the hundreds and thousands of parts per trillion in their drinking water," Collett said.

Tim Bergère, an environmental attorney in Pennsylvania who previously worked for the DEP, helped to draft the legislation. He says the combination of a hazardous substances listing

and a drinking water limit lower than the EPA's advisory would provide a powerful one-two legal punch, enabling the state, impacted towns, or even private citizens to seek a claim against the military. But due to quirks in the law, both would need to be in place to have strong legal standing.

"It would allow any person, including municipalities and water authorities, to recover their costs of investigating and remediating releases of PFAS," Bergère said.

The hazardous substances listing will likely have a companion bill in the state House, where state Rep. Todd Polinchock, R-144, of Chalfont, says he has circulated a co-sponsor memo to build support among colleagues prior to introducing legislation.

But so far no representatives have signed onto Collett's 10-ppt drinking water proposal. Stephens said he intends to introduce a measure calling for the complete elimination of PFAS, and state Rep. Tom Murt, R-152, of Upper Moreland, introduced legislation in prior sessions to set PFOS and PFOA standards at 5 ppt.

Complicating the matter, no such bills have previously advanced past committee, with supporters saying they primarily received pushback from water utilities concerned the standards would result in an expensive, unfunded mandate. Tim Hagey, general manager of the Warminster Municipal Authority, said he's heard those worries from his colleagues at other authorities.

"They say, 'You've got the Navy helping you pay for it. Nobody's going to help us pay for treatment,'" Hagey said.



State Sen. Maria Collett,



State Rep. Todd Polinchock



State Rep. Thomas Murt



Tim Bergère, Former PDEP Attorney

Bergère takes issue with such thinking, saying other communities would be empowered to find a polluter to pay and that it's better to know what hazards exist.

"There's an element of that, which to me, has to be a concern," Bergère said. "That it's OK that you're drinking contaminants as long as they're not regulated."

But Collett says she thinks the "tide is shifting" on the issue in the General Assembly from past years, as PFAS is being found in more communities across the state. And she adds that while lawmakers and DEP haven't coordinated on their efforts, that doesn't mean there's any animosity.

"I view them as partners, not competitors, and I think they see me the same way," Collett said. "We're all working our hardest to pursue every possible avenue that we can think of to bring relief to the victims of this crisis."

Others have sought ways around the perennial hurdles that come with creating regulations. Last session, Stephens introduced legislation that would give municipalities the ability to redirect tax revenues generated from redevelopment of land affected by PFAS contamination from military facilities in order to offset the costs of cleanup. The bill cleared committee, but was ultimately voted down by what Stephens said were election season motivations. He intends to reintroduce it this session.

"There are some slight tweaks to try and address some of the concerns that were raised," Stephens said, adding it would have a broader scope to appeal to more lawmakers.

At the DEP, secretary Patrick McDonnell announced over the past year that the department will set a state drinking water limit and environmental cleanup standards. But the DEP has not previously set its own drinking water limits for any chemicals, and is struggling to hire scientists it says it needs to make any regulations legally defensible. Even then, the DEP says it is required by state law to go through a formal process that requires time for a cost-benefit analysis and public input.

"Establishing a (drinking

water standard) is not a simple task and we are committed to proposing a standard that is appropriate and defensible," said spokeswoman Elizabeth Rementer, adding it could take two years. "Given the significant health implications involved for Pennsylvania residents, DEP is moving forward as quickly as possible while adhering to the legal requirements."

Environmental cleanup standards face similar timelines. Troy Conrad, director of the DEP's Environmental Cleanup and Brownfields program, said this week the department has already drafted soil standards and will recommend them to its Environmental Quality Board this fall. That would setup a possibility for formal adoption in late 2020.

But Bergère believes the DEP could already be acting to stem the flow of PFAS chemicals off the bases in southeast Pennsylvania using a different authority. Under the state's "Act 2" regulations, the EPA's 70-ppt drinking water advisory automatically becomes a groundwater standard, and the state's Clean Streams Law gives it the ability to order the military to stop allowing PFAS to leak from the bases into off-base waterways like Horsham's Park Creek, Bergère says.

"Every molecule, even at 2 ppt, of PFOA going to Park Creek violates the Clean Streams Law," Bergère said, adding he believes the DEP is declining to issue a violation to the military out of discretion. "By statute there's just no doubt about it."

The DEP agrees a 70-ppt groundwater standard exists, and said it has used its Clean Streams authority where "appropriate to do so." Rementer added the DEP is requiring the Air Guard Station to obtain a permit to treat groundwater and stormwater coming from the base.

But Rementer said that because the Navy's adjacent Willow Grove facility is closed, the EPA is the lead agency overseeing any discharges there.

"DEP has been working cooperatively with EPA, the Navy, and the Air National Guard," Rementer said, noting the EPA sent letters in March to the Department of Defense "requesting that they develop and implement plans for continued surface water monitoring on both facilities and, in the case of the Horsham Air Guard Station, a plan for controlling the movement of contaminated groundwater offsite."

"DEP strongly supports these requests," Rementer added.

Bergère said he believes the EPA's involvement at Willow Grove doesn't preclude the DEP from taking action.

"Every discharge off of that site into Park Creek is a violation of the Clean Streams Law, every single day," Bergère argued.

PFAS

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problem it faces.

"I'm part of a situation that's too big to even solve, which is part of the reason why I can't be so mad at any particular person, because it's so bad," Vernik said.

But just like the local community leaders, a little dose of empathy isn't a cure for Vernik's water woes.

"The (Navy) has a lot of jets that are worth a good few billion dollars, and they keep getting more," he said. "How about you skip a year of buying four of them, and you take care of this water situation?"



A bathroom remains unused at the home Steven Vernik owns in Warwick. After finding that their private well contained high levels of PFAS, the family moved to a new home in Buckingham. [WILLIAM THOMAS CAIN / CORRESPONDENT]



The filtration system Steven Vernik had installed in the home he owns in the Hartsville section of Warwick, after learning the private drinking water well was contaminated with high levels of PFAS. [WILLIAM THOMAS CAIN / CORRESPONDENT]