Professionals Unite at the 2025 PFAS Summit to Share Knowledge and Solutions

On October 9 and 10, the PFAS Summit, organized by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) in collaboration with partners like the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT), drew an impressive crowd at the NJIT campus in Newark. With nearly 300 participants, the summit featured a diverse lineup of speakers, each bringing unique perspectives and expertise to the discussion. For those interested in learning more about the speakers' backgrounds, a link to their bios is available, along with a detailed agenda of the event.

The summit provided a valuable opportunity for networking and knowledge sharing among professionals dedicated to addressing the challenges posed by PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances). Also known as “forever chemicals,” these are a large family of thousands of artificial chemicals that have been used in industrial and commercial applications for over 70 years. PFAS are known to negatively impact human health. Several presentations focused on chemistry and emerging technology, engaging the chemistry enthusiasts.

For non-technical experts that will need to engage in this work, what specific information is vital for them to know? Consumers need to ask themselves how they can reduce the number of PFAS-containing products they use. Manufacturers, on the other hand, must find viable alternatives to these harmful chemicals in their products. For policymakers, it's crucial to explore what measures can be enacted to safeguard our health, waterways, drinking water, air, and soil. Change often does not come from merely understanding the harmful effects of a chemical; it comes from advocacy, policy making, and regulations. Senator Greenstein attended the second day of the summit and is sponsoring Bill S1042, Session 2024-2025, titled “Protecting Against Forever Chemicals Act.” This bill establishes requirements, prohibitions, and programs for regulating perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).

Those managing water utilities who are dealing with removing PFAS, are dealing with costly upgrades and anticipating stricter regulations not only from the state but also from the federal government. Where is that funding going to come from? Thomas Laustsen, P.E., Chief Operating Officer of the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission (PVSC), explained that their estimated cost to treat PFAS is actually more than their current operating budget.

Regardless, water utilities must prepare for what is to come. Municipal leaders and city council members also need to rise to the challenge, as they will likely play a pivotal role in approving costly upgrades necessary to address this issue. From a communications perspective, we must craft messages that resonate with various stakeholders, empowering them to take action based on their specific roles and responsibilities.

Despite the complexity and challenges ahead, the summit made it evident the dedication of scientists, regulators, and innovators who are actively confronting the PFAS problem. As mentioned at the event, “chemistry created the problem; chemistry has to now create the

solution.” Behind the scenes, numerous lab technicians are diligently working on the chemistry aspects, while technology experts are developing innovative tools to tackle this crisis.

Where does Jersey Water Works fit in? Our vision is for safe, affordable drinking water, clean waterways, healthy communities, and sustainable local jobs. The path forward is rooted in collaboration and multisector partnerships. We are exploring the creation of a task force or committee at the request of our members. At the annual conference on December 11, Jersey Water Works will host a learning lab called "***Connecting the Dots: Organizing Our Approach to PFAS Challenges***." This session will be divided into two parts: Part 1, Mapping Existing Efforts, and Part 2, Exploring Collaboration Opportunities. The stakes are high, and the time to act is now.

In addition, on October 21, with the New Jersey Future’s Funding Navigator team, Jersey Water Works is co-sponsoring a webinar titled, Debt Isn’t A Bad Word: Navigating Funding to Address PFAS in Drinking Water from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. This webinar is another opportunity to hear about the associated costs of treatment and explore ways to navigate funding in the PFAS landscape.