



Background on HB 3123

Introduced by the House Agriculture, Land Use and Water Committee

What is HB 3123?

HB 3123 would fund and direct the Oregon State University (OSU) Extension/College of Agricultural Sciences of OSU to study the effects of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in land applied biosolids on soil, water, and agricultural crops in select sites across the state. This bill has been introduced at the request of the Oregon Association of Clean Water Agencies (ACWA), the League of Oregon Cities, and the Special Districts Association of Oregon. ACWA consulted with OSU soil and water quality researchers and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) in developing the scope and approach of the prospective study. The total cost of the study for the 2023-2025 biennium is estimated at \$550,000.

Why is Sustainable Management of Biosolids Important?

Biosolids are the solids by-product of municipal wastewater treatment processes. Treated to meet strict US EPA and DEQ standards, biosolids are stable, nutrient-rich organic materials applied on land as fertilizers and soil conditioners for crops and land reclamation. Some utilities turn biosolids into compost that is used for a variety of purposes. Biosolids help soil retain moisture and sequester carbon, and they facilitate formation of good soil structure. Land application of biosolids is a sustainable soil building practice, offsetting the demands for commercial fertilizers, and benefitting farmers across the state of Oregon—***biosolids land application is economical and promotes healthy soil for crops.***

Why is PFAS a Concern?

Growing scientific evidence shows that exposure to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) may lead to a range of human health problems. PFAS do not breakdown easily, they are difficult to treat, and they are found just about everywhere. For these reasons, PFAS have been dubbed “forever chemicals.” PFAS compounds are found in thousands of common consumer products and are used in some commercial and industrial processes. They are released directly to the air, land, and water in a variety of ways. Due to their strong chemical bonds, they do not break down with current wastewater treatment technologies, so PFAS received at treatment plants are passed through to water and biosolids.

Why is the Proposed Study of PFAS in Biosolids Important to Oregonians?

The US EPA is assessing risks and implementing methods and requirements for PFAS monitoring and source reduction actions that will be implemented by states and local governments. In the meantime, state and local agencies in Oregon have undertaken proactive efforts to identify sources and levels of PFAS in Oregon. Information produced from these efforts to date has indicated PFAS sources and concentrations do not require immediate statewide action. This enables the state to move forward responsibly and strategically to generate sound science and data-based approaches to locating and reducing PFAS exposure at the source.

HB 3123 will fund OSU researchers, in collaboration with DEQ, Oregon ACWA, local wastewater utilities, and participating farmers, to conduct studies that will inform local and state decisionmakers and farmers about biosolids land application safety and risks related to PFAS. Maintaining sustainable biosolids management practices as a partnership between wastewater utilities and agricultural communities has multiple environmental and economic benefits. **This study will deliver the information needed to make sound policy decisions about the future of these practices.**