

By Bobby Magill

Florida Must Toughen Rules for Water Pollutants, EPA Says

Dec. 5, 2022, 4:54 PM; Updated: Dec. 5, 2022, 5:18 PM

- EPA moves to write water standards for Florida
- Florida proposed standards but failed to finalize them

Florida's water quality standards for streams and wetlands aren't strong enough to protect human health, the EPA told state environment officials.

The determination paves the way for the Environmental Protection Agency to set surface water quality standards for Florida if the state doesn't act.

Existing human health criteria for surface waters are insufficient to keep people safe from pollution, and new criteria need to be developed for 37 pollutants for which the state currently has no standards, including benzene and toluene, EPA said.

The agency said Florida needs to strengthen existing standards for 40 pollutants, including fluorene, chloroform, beryllium, antimony, pyrene and tetrachloroethylene.

Radhika Fox, EPA's assistant administrator for water, sent the [letter](#) Dec. 1 to Florida Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Shawn Hamilton.

Florida DEP is evaluating its next steps to improve the state's water quality, DEP spokeswoman Alexandra Kuchta said Monday.

"Florida has long acknowledged the need and has been working to update its standards and we look forward to working with EPA and stakeholders as we move forward in this process," she said.

The EPA didn't immediately respond to requests for comment.

Fish Consumption

Water quality concerns focus on the fish consumption rate in the state using standards dating to 1992, which don't account for current science or recent increases in fish consumption, according to the agency.

The state attempted to adopt new water quality standards in 2016, but they were never finalized or submitted to the EPA for review under Section 303(c) of the Clean Water Act, the agency said.

In October, state officials told the EPA that Florida's "efforts to obtain updated State-specific fish consumption data were delayed by the pandemic, and that the State is currently evaluating its options for updating" pollutant criteria, Fox said in her letter.

The state provided no timeline for updating its standards, Fox wrote.

Though the state can proceed with its own water quality rulemaking if it chooses, the Clean Water Act requires EPA to propose its own water quality standards for Florida now that the agency has determined that the state's standards are deficient.

If the state finalizes its own new standards and EPA approves them, the EPA will stop work on creating standards for Florida at the federal level, Fox said.

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