DRINKING WATER TREATMENT

EPA proposes UCMR 6 monitoring rule, leaves microplastics off testing list

The EPA's proposed UCMR 6 mandates monitoring for 30 unregulated contaminants in public water systems from 2028 to 2030.

Alex Cossin July 6, 2026 4 min read

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has proposed the sixth Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule (UCMR 6), requiring public water

systems to monitor for 30 unregulated contaminants between 2028 and 2030 to better understand their occurrence in drinking water systems nationwide. While the proposal expands monitoring for several emerging contaminants, EPA opted not to include microplastics, citing the lack of a validated analytical method capable of producing nationally consistent monitoring data.

Under the proposed rule, community water systems and non-transient non-community water systems serving more than 3,300 people would be required to monitor for all 30 contaminants. EPA would also select a representative sample of smaller systems serving 3,300 or fewer people to participate. The contaminant list includes seven ultrashort organofluorine compounds, including several PFAS, three pesticide metabolites, 13 semivolatile organic compounds and seven purgeable organic compounds. The agency said the resulting occurrence data will help determine whether additional contaminants warrant future regulation under the Safe Drinking Water Act.

Proposed UCMR 6 contaminants list

According to EPA's proposed UCMR 6 rule, public water systems would monitor for **30 unregulated contaminants** grouped into four analytical categories.

Purgeable organic compounds (7)

Analyzed using EPA Method 524.3 (enhanced sensitivity)

- 1,2,4-Trimethylbenzene
- 1,2,3-Trichloropropane (1,2,3-TCP)
- 1,1,2,2-Tetrachloroethane
- Total 1,3-Dichloropropene (cis- and trans-)
- Naphthalene

- Naphthalene
- Hexachlorobutadiene
- 1,1,1,2-Tetrachloroethane

Semivolatile organic compounds (13)

Analyzed using EPA Method 525.3

- Phorate
- Chlorothalonil
- Dichlorvos (DDVP)
- Metribuzin
- N,N-Diethyl-m-toluamide (DEET)
- Pyrene
- Trifluralin
- Isophorone
- 2,4-Dinitrotoluene
- 2,6-Dinitrotoluene
- Tetrachlorvinphos (Stirofos)
- Anthracene
- Fluorene

Pesticide metabolites (3)

Analyzed using EPA Method 540

- Chlorpyrifos oxon
- Phorate sulfone
- Phorate sulfoxide

Ultrashort organofluorine compounds (7)

Analyzed using EPA Method 563

- Perfluoropropanesulfonic acid (PFPrS)
- Perfluoropropanoic acid (PFPrA)
- Perfluoroethanesulfonic acid (PFEtS)

- Perfluoro-2-methoxyacetic acid (PFMOAA)
- Trifluoromethanesulfonic acid (TFMS)
- Bistriflimide (TFSI)
- Trifluoroacetic acid (TFA)

Notable exclusions

EPA specifically considered, but **did not include**, several high-profile contaminant groups:

- **Microplastics** — excluded because EPA determined there is no validated national analytical method suitable for UCMR monitoring, despite petitions from seven governors and environmental organizations requesting their inclusion.
- **Pharmaceuticals** — EPA also evaluated pharmaceuticals for UCMR 6 but ultimately did not include them in the proposed monitoring list.

For utilities, one of the biggest takeaways is that UCMR 6 shifts attention toward ultrashort-chain PFAS and other organofluorine compounds, which have historically been difficult to monitor but are increasingly drawing regulatory interest due to their persistence and mobility in water. At the same time, EPA signaled that microplastics remain a future priority, with the agency stating it intends to pursue monitoring once standardized analytical methods become available.

Microplastics were among the most anticipated contaminants during development of UCMR 6. EPA acknowledged receiving significant public interest, including a petition from the governors of seven states requesting that microplastics be included in the monitoring program. However, the agency concluded that available methods are not yet mature enough to support a national occurrence study.

According to EPA, no validated EPA or consensus-based analytical method currently exists that can consistently detect and characterize microplastics in drinking water across laboratories. The agency noted that existing methods vary widely in the sizes and types of plastic particles they detect, making it difficult to generate reliable national occurrence data that could support future regulatory decisions.

Although microplastics are absent from UCMR 6, EPA emphasized that the contaminant remains a priority. Earlier this year, the agency proposed adding microplastics as a contaminant group to the draft Sixth Contaminant Candidate List (CCL 6), a move intended to support additional research on occurrence, health effects, analytical methods and treatment technologies. EPA said information gathered through the CCL process could ultimately pave the way for future monitoring requirements once standardized testing methods become available.

EPA also said it will continue collaborating with federal agencies, researchers and standards organizations to develop validated analytical methods and improve understanding of which microplastic particles may pose the greatest public health concern. The agency identified these efforts as a necessary step before nationwide monitoring can be implemented through a future UCMR cycle.

If finalized, UCMR 6 would replace UCMR 5, with monitoring taking place from January 2028 through December 2030. EPA estimates the program will cost approximately $33.7 million annually nationwide. As with previous UCMR cycles, EPA will pay laboratory analysis and shipping costs for systems serving 10,000 or fewer people, reducing the financial burden on small utilities. Public comments on the proposed rule are due by Aug. 31, 2026.

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