Air Force awards pilot study for groundwater treatment at Cannon AFB

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JOINT BASE SAN ANTONIO-LACKLAND, Texas – The Air Force has awarded a $16.6 million contract for a pilot study and engineering evaluation/cost estimate at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., that could help protect drinking water and accelerate possible long-term actions to address two perfluorinated substances in water supplies near the base.

Under the contract, awarded to AECOM/Brice, the Air Force Civil Engineer Center will install a small-scale water treatment system at Cannon's southeast corner to remove perfluorooctane sulfonate and perfluorooctanoic acid, also known as PFOS and PFOA, from groundwater leaving the base. These two compounds were once used in firefighting foam and a host of consumer and industrial products. In May 2016, the Environmental Protection Agency issued lifetime health advisories of 70 parts per trillion for PFOS and PFOA in drinking water supplies, and the Air Force has been taking action to identify and address possible impacts of past releases of the compounds at Cannon to drinking water supplies on and near the base.

The selected treatment system will treat 600 gallons per minute and could be expanded to cover the entire southern border of the base. The pilot study will bench test three different pump and treat filtration methods — granular activated carbon, ion resin exchange and a combination of the two. While a remedial investigation is underway at the base to delineate the nature and extent of the PFOS/PFOA releases from the base, the Air Force environmental team will use data gathered from the study to evaluate both near term interim actions and long-term treatment options for protecting the Ogallala Aquifer, said Christipher Gierke, the remedial project manager for the Cannon restoration effort.

"This is a major step toward addressing the community's concerns about the health of the Ogallala Aquifer," Gierke said. "We've focused the study in an area that is one of the most affected by PFOS/PFOA."

The contract also funds and engineering evaluation/cost analysis to consider near term interim response actions to supplement other actions the Air Force has already taken at the installation to protect human health and drinking water. The data from the study will support the analysis, and could help speed up the evaluation of alternate responses to PFOS and PFOA in the environment, Gierke said.

"We're aware how long this process feels for the people of Clovis," Gierke said. "We've listened to their concerns and worked tirelessly to implement this study to get an interim treatment method in place quickly."

For more information and to stay up to date on PFOS/PFOA actions at Cannon AFB and past meeting recordings, visit https://www.cannon.af.mil/Environmental/.