Testimony in Support of HB 4049– PFAS Biosolids Study

February 7, 2024

Dear Chair Helm, Vice Chairs Owens and Hartman, and members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water,

On behalf of our thousands of members and the communities we serve across Oregon, Beyond Toxics strongly encourages the Committee to support HB 4049, a bill to develop a scientific study of the PFAS class of chemicals in biosolids. This legislative proposal is a critical step forward to protecting Oregon's water quality and soil.

PFAS are a large family of compounds used in non-stick coatings, textiles, paper products, food packaging, some firefighting foams, and many other products. At the end of their useful life, these ubiquitous household and industrial products are disposed of in landfills and incinerators, where their chemical components, including PFAS, become part of the waste stream.

PFAS chemicals entrained in biosolids have become an emerging concern due to their potential to increase toxicity in soil amendments on agricultural lands. Some PFAS chemicals, such as PFOA and PFOS, are persistent and bioaccumulative, and are not known to break down in the environment. These substances are recognized for their toxicity at low concentrations. (USEPA 2003 Ref#858; ATSDR 2020 Ref#1942; NTP 2016; CONCAWE 2016).

PFAS present in soils are subject to run-off and leaching during precipitation or irrigation that promote spreading of soil-bound contaminants (Sepulvado et al. 2011; Ahrens and Bundschuh 2014). As a result, PFAS can transport from surface soils to groundwater and surface water. Recently there has been an increase in the focus on biosolids contribution to PFAS leaching because of the practice of land application of biosolids as fertilizer. However, more needs to be done to understand the possibility of PFAS contamination in biosolids applied on agricultural lands.

We urge legislators to support the passage of HB 4049. It is critical that we increase scientific understanding of the potential for PFAS to accumulate in biosolids in a way that may impact crops, soil, and water quality. HB 4049 will provide Oregon policy makers with sound, scientific information to further ensure the safety of Oregon's biosolids land application programs.

Sincerely,
Lisa Arkin, Executive Director
Beyond Toxics