

“Through no fault of my own, I was exposed to these toxic chemicals. And as a result, I will die with this cancer.”

Amara Strande is a 20 year old woman from Minnesota with an exceedingly rare form of cancer. She testified in support of newly introduced legislation that will address PFAS pollution in Minnesota by banning non-essential use, requiring disclosure when it is used, and by banning use in firefighting foam. The strength and bravery of Amara, her father Michael Strande, her mother Reverend Dana Strande, and her sister Nora Strande in speaking out during such a trying time is immense. Our thoughts and prayers are with them. Clean Water Action will continue our work to prevent pollution at the source, clean up existing polluted sites, and hold those accountable responsible.

We share her words here with permission.



UPDATE: Amara passed away three days before her 21st birthday and the first Minnesota House vote on PFAS Prevention Legislation. Our thoughts are with her family and friends who, despite their grief, rallied at the legislature in her honor in support of the bill passage. The PFAS Prevention Legislation she advocated for was passed on May 19th, 2023 as part of the omnibus environment, natural resources, climate, and energy finance and policy bill with bipartisan support. This bill included language banning all non-essential use of PFAS chemicals, requires manufacturers who are selling products in Minnesota to disclose if PFAS chemicals are present, and closes a loophole in the 2019 bill that ended the use of PFAS in firefighting foam. In October, Clean Water Action established the Amara Strande Advocacy Award in her honor, with the first honorees being her parents Dana and Michael and her sister Nora. Clean Water is continuing our work in Minnesota and nationwide to stop PFAS pollution at the source.

My name is Amara Strande.

I am 20 years old, and at the age of 15, I was diagnosed with Stage 4 fibrolamellar hepatocellular carcinoma, an incredibly rare form of liver cancer that occurs in 1 in 5,000,000. Due to its rarity and low survival rate, there is no standardized form of systematic treatment other than surgery. There are no curative options, no road map, and no plan.

Thanks to its unpredictable nature, fibrolamellar at times feels like it kills in ways too cruel to comprehend. I've had over 20 surgeries, including two liver resections and one open chest surgery. My first tumor weighed in at a hefty 15 lbs, putting me in a coma that lasted over a month. While my body underwent the horrors of surgery gone wrong, kidney failure, and over 75% of my liver removed, my mind went through a series of neverending nightmares that felt all too real. Haunting me to this very day through PTSD and a scar on my abdomen spanning more than a foot long.

Since that time, I have undergone several rounds of chemotherapy and radiation that had no effect. I have had many surgeries that had kept the cancer at bay. 2022 is the year that my cancer became unstoppable. Last spring, I learned that all four of the tumors removed in the December of 2021 surgery in New York City — All of them grew back, now worse than ever before. The tumor in the brachial plexus grew back wrapping around the upper right side of my chest fracturing my first and third rib, with an additional tumor growing next to my heart. The pain it has created in my right hand is excruciating. And it has affected my voice as well. And little can be done to subside it — the pain.

They can't do surgery this time. There are no more treatments to try. I can no longer move my fingers to braid my hair or play piano.

Growing up I lived in the 3M plume and attended Tartan Senior High School, where I met many classmates also directly affected by cancer as a result of what we now understand these chemicals to be, PFAS. When toxins in the environment hit a person's DNA at a particular vulnerability a cell mutates, resulting in cancer or other serious illnesses. One of my cells mutated, and cancer began to grow.

Unfortunately, people being subjected to dangerous chemicals unknowingly happens far too often. It's a repeated offense that has festered in our land, water, and bodies for decades. And despite public knowledge of said environmental waste dumping, little has been done to clean up or hold those deemed responsible for the deadly cause and effect that has robbed my community.

We have all paid a high price due to large corporations carelessly dumping known toxic chemicals. However, we have yet to see public health repaid for the time, money, and the emotional turmoil inflicted by these same chemicals at the expense of our lives.

I've spent the last five years fighting cancer with every ounce of my being. And I will for the rest of my life. Corporations must stop the production of these toxins and be held accountable and pay for the damage they've done. Through no fault of my own, I was exposed to these toxic chemicals. And as a result, I will die with this cancer. My life has been forever changed by this disease and the physical and emotional toll it is taking

on me and my loved ones is unimaginable.

But my story is not unique.

In my community, I see neighbors and friends who have also been affected by these toxic chemicals. This is not just an individual problem. It's a community problem, and it's time for action to be taken. We need stricter regulations on the use of PFAS chemicals and more research to be done on the long term effects of exposure. We also need more education for the public, about the dangers of these chemicals so that people can make informed choices about the products they use.

I also want to see the cleanup of these toxic chemicals and the corporations held accountable for their actions. The health and well-being of our communities should be a top priority, and we must take action to protect ourselves and future generations from the devastating effects of PFAS. I care about this issue because it has personally changed the direction of my life and the lives of those around me. PFAS robbed my sister and I of a normal childhood in our teenage years.

But it is not just about me. It is about the health and safety of all of us.

We must come together to demand change and hold those responsible accountable for their actions. I urge all of you to take a stand against these toxic chemicals and demand change. Together we can make a difference and protect ourselves and future generations from the devastating effects of PFAS.

Thank you.

Minnesota Passes the Nation’s Strongest PFAS Regulations

ST PAUL, MN — The Minnesota legislature has adjourned until February 12, 2024. One major piece of legislation Governor Walz is expected to sign within the week is the omnibus environment, natural resources, climate, and energy finance and policy bill. This bill includes language banning all non-essential use of perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), known as “forever chemicals,” requires manufacturers who are selling products in Minnesota to disclose if PFAS chemicals are present, and closes a loophole in the 2019 bill that ended the use of PFAS in firefighting foam. The omnibus bill passed the Minnesota House and Senate on May 19th with bipartisan support.

PFAS exposure has been linked to low birth weights, lower IQ, reduced immune response, thyroid disease, digestive system issues, cardiovascular problems, cancer, reproductive system issues such as testicular cancer, pre-eclampsia, increased infertility, and gestational diabetes. These chemicals bioaccumulate, which is why they are called “forever chemicals.”

Avonna Starck, Minnesota state director for Clean Water Action, spoke of Amara Strande. Amara dedicated the last few months of her life while in considerable pain from cancer testifying in front of House and Senate committees regarding the need to ban non-essential uses of PFAS. “While we celebrate this historic accomplishment, we mourn the loss of Amara Strande, who died of cancer two days before her 21st

birthday and three days before the House vote she worked so hard to see. We mourn for all the lives cut tragically short from illnesses linked to PFAS exposure. Today, Minnesota said loud and clear that we refuse to allow another generation of Minnesotans to suffer due to PFAS exposure. Today we put our environment, our families, and our tax dollars first.”

Other Tartan graduates who linked their illnesses to the PFAS plume in the east metro also testified in person and in writing throughout the legislative session. “Derek Lowen and Ben Rule played an important role in passing this language by telling their stories. Derek survived a baseball sized brain tumor and Ben lived through leukemia. Their experiences matter and their bravery made a difference in this process,” Starck said.

There are currently 108 policies addressing PFAS in 24 states, but none of the policies are as comprehensive as Minnesota’s soon to be signed law.

“Documentation proves that manufacturers knew as early as 1950 that PFAS was toxic and yet products that contained it were promoted and sold to make a profit. PFAS was developed in Minnesota, and it’s powerful that it ends here, too,” Starck said.

Representatives Jeff Brand, Matt Norris, Athena Hollins, Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn, and Sydney Jordan and Senators Judy Seeberger, Kelly



Lobbying at the MN statehouse for the passage of the nation’s strongest PFAS regulations

Morrison, Heather Gustafson, and Erin Maye-Quade all carried elements of the language that were folded into the omnibus bills carried by Representative Rick Hansen and Senator Fought Hawj.

When asked about his role in the legislation, Representative Jeff Brand said, “This is the first step of the major changes needed to protect families and our environmental legacy. I am so proud to partner with the MPCA, Clean Water Action Minnesota, and other advocacy groups in authoring and advocating for this historic legislation.”

Clean Water Action is beginning to develop its Minnesota legislative agenda for next session to continue their work around addressing PFAS and PFAS pollution in Minnesota’s waters.

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency: PFAS Prohibitions and Reporting Timeline

Jan. 1, 2024

Intentionally added PFAS in firefighting foam prohibited for testing, training, and incident response, with limited exceptions which expire within a few years. Intentionally added PFAS in food packaging prohibited.

Jan. 1, 2025

Intentionally added PFAS in 11 categories of products are prohibited. These are the first prohibitions under Amara’s Law to take effect: Carpets or rugs, cleaning products, cookware, cosmetics, dental floss, fabric treatments, juvenile products, menstruation products, textile furnishings, ski wax, and upholstered furniture.

Jan 1, 2032

All products which contain intentionally added PFAS, including pesticides and soil amendments, are prohibited unless the use of the PFAS in the product is determined to be a currently unavoidable use. Some medical products, including prosthetic devices and any medical devices, drugs, or products regulated by the US FDA for use in medical applications, are exempted from the 2032 prohibitions. However, those products must be reported if they contain intentionally added PFAS starting in 2026.

Jan. 1, 2026 — Reporting requirements

Reporting requirements begin on PFAS in products. Any manufacturer selling products containing intentionally added PFAS in Minnesota must report on the PFAS and their purposes.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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