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Delivering for Our Communities: Pollution and Toxic Cleanup

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Delivering for Our Communities is a series of issue briefs that describe the major federal funding opportunities available due to the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). This document examines funding opportunities applicable to the **cleanup of toxic pollution** and describes the types of projects that may be funded with the federal grants. Community advocates can dive deeper into these opportunities to develop proposals and pressure policymakers to advance equity and improve health outcomes.

IIJA Programs on Pollution and Toxic Cleanup

Abandoned Mine Lands Reclamation – \$11.3 billion allotted

Abandoned mines pose health and safety risks in the form of dangerous mine shafts, unstable slopes, and chemical drainage that can contaminate groundwater. The IIJA replenishes the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund. State and Tribal agencies can apply for funding to reclaim long-abandoned coal mines.

Poly- or Per-Fluoroalkyl Substance (PFAS) Cleanup – \$10 billion allotted

PFAS is a class of chemicals that are used in coatings on a variety of products. These toxic substances break down very slowly in nature and accumulate in groundwater, wildlife, and human bodies. Known as “[forever chemicals](#),” PFAS has widely contaminated our water and has been linked to cancer, birth defects, immune system harm, and other diseases. The IIJA supplemented the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) to allow communities to clean up PFAS sites. In these cases, funding is provided in the form of a grant that does not need to be repaid. Half of the PFAS cleanup funding is specifically designated for small and disadvantaged communities. A community is considered to be “disadvantaged” based on factors that vary by state. 90% of the funding is only available to state, municipal, and Tribal governments; however, any public, nonprofit, or private entity may apply for the remaining funding allocated to the CWSRF.

Orphaned Wells – \$4.7 billion allotted

Orphaned wells are holes that remain after fossil fuel extraction has been completed. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that there are more than a million so-called “orphan” wells abandoned by defunct companies that cannot afford to plug them. These wells often leak methane, a powerful greenhouse gas, and can leach toxins into groundwater. The IIJA provides \$4.7 billion to plug, remediate, and restore orphaned oil and gas wells on federal, state, Tribal, and private lands.

Orphaned well funding is allocated to states by formula and must be used to plug, remediate, and restore well sites. States and Tribes must apply directly to the Department of Interior to receive the funds.

Superfund Cleanup – \$3.5 billion allotted

The Hazardous Substance Superfund is used by the EPA to clean up designated contaminated sites. The IJJA injected \$3.5 billion into this fund and revived an excise tax on certain chemical manufacturers. This additional funding for Superfund cleanup will allow communities to continue moving forward on cleanup efforts. State, municipal, and Tribal governments may apply for agency review of a particular site to determine whether it is eligible for funding and remediation (EPA-directed cleanup). The EPA maintains an [interactive map of existing](#) Superfund sites to check if a site is listed. More information about how to get a contaminated site in your community on the National Priorities List for Superfund can be found [here](#).

Brownfields and Land Revitalization – \$1.5 billion allotted

The Brownfields and Land Revitalization Program provides grants to support cleanup and sustainable redevelopment of contaminated industrial sites. Available grants fund assessment, cleanup, job training, and State/Tribal Response Programs. Eligibility varies based on the grant, but in general, any organization—public, private, or nonprofit—can apply.

The Progressive Caucus Action Fund thanks the Georgetown Law's Center on Poverty and Inequality's Economic Security and Opportunity Initiative for their comments and insights

Summary of IIJA Programs on Pollution and Toxic Cleanup

Program Name	Disbursing Agency	Grant Type ¹	Amount of Funding	Key Stakeholder	Timeline
Abandoned Mine Lands Reclamation	Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement	Formula	\$11.3 billion	State/Tribal agency contact	N/A: Rolling applications
PFAS Cleanup	EPA	Formula	\$10 billion	State DWSRF Administrator ; State CWSRF Contact ; State Small & Underserved Community Grant Contact	N/A: Rolling applications
Orphaned Wells	Department of the Interior	Formula	\$4.7 billion	State agency contact (varies by state)	States must apply by May 15, 2022
Superfund Cleanup	EPA	Formula	\$3.5 billion	State agency contact (varies by state)	N/A: Rolling applications
Brownfields and Land Revitalization	EPA	Competitive; State/Tribal Response Program grants are formula-based	\$1.5 billion	Office of Brownfields and Land Revitalization Regional Contact	Applications for State/Tribal Response Program grants due June 3, 2022. Some other grants are available on a rolling basis.

¹ For details about different types of grants, check out [PCAF's explainer on federal implementation processes](#).