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Executive Summary

The study examined the top 98 websites that people encounter when they search for "PFAS" and "water" on Google. The team classified websites by source, including news articles, local, state, and federal government pages, water utility websites, and nonprofits.

Based on a theory called the Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM), a website should provide both information about health risk severity and susceptibility and solutions that are effective and able to be implemented. This model says that if a message is too fear-inducing without offering a solution, people may feel hopeless and tune out the message. On the other hand, if a site doesn't show that the problem is serious, people might not think they need to take any action at all.

The study found that most websites fail to find this balance.

- **News Sites:** These sites are good at highlighting the dangers of PFAS. They often use "anxious" or negative language that can make people feel afraid. While they are more likely to provide solutions than government sites, the amount of helpful advice they offer is still quite low.
- **Local Government and Water Utility Sites:** These sites often portray lower personal risk to residents than media sites. Even in areas where PFAS levels are higher, local government and water utility sites do not use more language around susceptibility.
- **Hidden Solutions:** Instead of putting solutions on the main page, users have to click through to another page or read long reports to find out what to do, such as how to test their water or which filters to use.

Overall, efficacy information on all websites was low, but especially on federal and local government websites in comparison to news websites. Threat severity and susceptibility language was lowest on local government and water utility websites in comparison to media websites.

Actionable Highlights

- **Put Solutions on the First Page:** Websites should display clear advice on what to do to reduce the effects of PFAS (like "use a pitcher filter") on the main page so users don't have to search for it.



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- **Balance Fear with Action:** When sharing information about health risks of PFAS, pair it with a specific action people can take. High-threat messages should be balanced with actionable solutions.
- **Use Simple Language:** Messengers should use straightforward language for known health threats while keeping discussions about scientific "uncertainty" in a separate section to avoid confusing the audience.



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