

Press release

PFAS, UWWTD, phosphorus: focus on municipal water at IFAT Munich 2026

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- How cities and municipalities are coping with PFAS, climate impacts and new EU regulations
- Expert panels, solution tours and special areas at IFAT Munich 2026
- World-leading trade fair as a must-attend event for municipal decision-makers and practitioners

Cities and municipalities are under major pressure to act when it comes to water and wastewater management: Stricter regulations, climate impacts and increasing investment requirements are coming up against limited resources.

IFAT Munich 2026 will show which technical, regulatory and organizational solutions municipalities need now. From May 4 to 7, 2026, over 3,000 exhibitors from more than 60 countries will present their solutions for water, recycling and circularity at the world's leading trade fair for environmental technologies. A key focus is traditionally on water management. Municipalities in particular are faced with the task of future-proofing the drinking water supply and wastewater treatment, implementing new legal requirements, and expanding their infrastructures to make them climate-resilient.

Forever chemicals present new challenges for municipalities

The discussion about per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) has developed from a specialist topic into a socially relevant debate. Local authorities must comply for the first time with binding PFAS limit values in drinking water. That requires investments in monitoring, analytics and processing technologies. At the same time, there is an increased focus on site remediation, as the high mobility of these substances, also known as "forever chemicals", poses risks to the drinking water supply.

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The panel “PFAS in focus: challenges and solutions for dealing with the poison of the century” organized by figawa e. V. on May 6, 2026 on the Blue Stage will discuss how PFAS can be handled in technical and economic terms. In addition, a presentation by the German Association for Waste Management (DGAW) on May 4 will show how PFAS can be removed from water streams and destroyed using activated carbon.

UWWTD: Stricter requirements for urban water management

With the revised Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (UWWTD), the EU redefined the framework conditions for urban water management at the end of 2024. “A milestone for water protection, but also a huge challenge for wastewater management and municipalities,” says Dr. Lisa Irwin-Broß, member of the DWA Management Board. According to its specifications, a fourth purification stage will need to be added to several hundred wastewater treatment plants in Germany alone by 2045. In addition, wastewater treatment is to be energy-neutral in the future. The DWA is addressing the topic with a solutions tour on May 5 and a session on the Water Stage on May 7. The Association of Municipal Enterprises (VKU) will be discussing the financing of the fourth purification stage on the Blue Stage on May 4 in the presentation “UWWTD: status of financing the fourth purification stage through extended producer responsibility”.

Phosphorus recycling: planning security required for municipalities

From 2029, municipal wastewater treatment plant operators in Germany will be obliged to recover phosphorus if the phosphorus content of the sewage sludge dry matter is at least two percent. While the regulatory requirements are clear, many municipalities are now faced with operational questions regarding the economic implementation. “Phosphorus recycling should be integrated into the planning of sewage sludge recycling at an early stage and in the long term. An open dialog between all parties involved is crucial,” says Tabea Knickel, Managing Director of the German Phosphorus Platform (DPP). The DPP will be hosting the discussion panel “Phosphorus recovery in dialog: challenges and prospects” on May 7 on the Blue Stage. The DWA and DVGW will already be using the stage on May 6 for their joint innovation forum “Regional Phosphorus Recycling”.

Protecting critical water infrastructure is becoming increasingly important

In view of geopolitical risks, hybrid threats, and new legal requirements, protecting critical infrastructures is becoming increasingly important. The drinking water supply and wastewater disposal are affected directly. The NIS2 Implementation Act and the planned KRITIS Umbrella Act form the legal framework for this. "The acts give the industry a clear legal framework for necessary investments and for implementing measures," says Peter Frenz from the DVGW. "The resilience of critical infrastructures in Germany can only be increased through a comprehensive approach that holistically considers risks from the cyber, information and physical space." At IFAT Munich, the "Day of resilient municipalities" on May 7, will focus on this topic with presentations on the Blue Stage and accompanying solution tours.

Making municipalities water-conscious

Climate change, heavy rain, dry spells and heat pose additional challenges for municipalities. Water-conscious urban planning can reduce the risk of flooding, safeguard urban greenery, and reduce heat stress. "The knowledge is available, and many pilot projects demonstrate its effectiveness. We now need to implement this on a broad scale in order to create livable settlement areas," says Dr. Friedrich Hetzel, Head of the DWA Water-Conscious Space and Settlement Development department. DWA and DVGW will be presenting the Spotlight Area "The water-wise city of the future" as well as several forums and sessions on the Blue Stage.

Using warm wastewater as an energy source

The heat contained in wastewater can cover five to ten percent of the heating requirements of buildings in Germany. "This potential is particularly interesting for operators of district and local heating networks. Not least because the Municipal Heat Planning Act, which came into force at the start of 2024, stipulates that all heating networks must be climate-neutral by 2045," explains Reinhard Reifenstuhl, DWA spokesperson for the main committee on the circular economy, energy, and sewage sludge. The heat can be extracted via heat exchangers directly in the sewage system or in the effluent of wastewater treatment plants. Both have advantages and disadvantages. These will be discussed on May 6 on the Blue Stage at the DWA session "Waste heat utilization / hydrothermal energy".

IFAT Munich

IFAT Munich is the world's leading platform for environmental technologies. Every two years, it presents solutions for water, recycling and circularity. The next IFAT Munich will be held at the exhibition center in Munich from May 4 to 7, 2026.

IFAT worldwide

In addition to the world's leading trade fair IFAT Munich, IFAT is currently the world's largest network for environmental technologies with eleven trade fairs. The global IFAT network includes IE expo China in Shanghai, IE expo Chengdu, IE expo Guangzhou and IE expo Shenzhen as well as IFAT Africa in Johannesburg, IFAT Eurasia in Istanbul, IFAT India in Mumbai, IFAT Delhi in New Delhi, IFAT Brasil in São Paulo, Singapore International Water Week (in cooperation with IFAT) in Singapore and, from 2026, IFAT Saudi Arabia in Riyadh. Together, the events of the IFAT network are driving the transformation toward sustainable technologies worldwide.

Messe München

As one of the world's leading trade fair organizers, Messe München presents the world of tomorrow at its around 90 international trade fairs. Its portfolio comprises trade fairs for capital and consumer goods, as well as for new technologies. These include 14 of the world's leading trade fairs such as bauma, BAU, IFAT and electronica, cooperative events such as the IAA MOBILITY, and numerous guest events. With an international network of affiliated companies and foreign representatives, Messe München is active worldwide. Together with its around 1,200 employees in the Group, it organizes trade fairs in China, India, Brazil, South Africa, Turkey, Singapore, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Thailand, the U.S., and Saudi Arabia. Around 150 events held annually attract more than 50,000 exhibitors and around three million visitors in Germany and abroad. That makes Messe München an important economic driver, triggering purchasing power effects in the billions.