

PFAS & PPE



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Growing public awareness has encouraged authorities to take stronger actions against PFAS, starting at the source of production. As a result, many textile and apparel manufacturers are facing increasing regulation in the European Union (EU) and the United States (US).

Health and environmental implications of PFAS

Traces of PFAS have been found in many products, including raincoats, underwear, and hiking pants. Because PFAS are found in fabrics, the chemical can enter the human body through direct contact with the skin.

PFAS have also been found in water, air, food packaging, fish, and soil, posing a problem for the textile as well as many other industries.

Reports have consistently found that exposure to PFAS can lead to cancer, infertility, high cholesterol levels, weakened immune systems, high blood pressure, and many other health problems.

Consumers are exposed not only through direct ingestion of products containing PFAS, but also through every stage of a product's lifecycle: production, use, and disposal.

Manufacturers that use forever chemicals are major contributors to PFAS pollution and climate change, as manufacturing facilities have been found to contaminate the air, water, soil, and surrounding communities. Products made with PFAS are eventually disposed of in landfills, which, depending on how the chemical breaks down, can lead to contamination of the soil and air.

ECHA PROPOSES BAN ON ALL PFAS

In January, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Norway jointly submitted a proposal for a European restriction on PFAS (Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) to the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA - European Chemicals Agency).

The aim of the restriction proposal is a comprehensive restriction to even a ban on both the use and production of these substances in order to limit the risks of PFAS to humans and the environment.

In order to avoid the substitution of one PFAS by another PFAS ("regrettable substitution"), a group approach was chosen, whereby virtually all PFAS are captured by the restriction.

The restriction is designed to cover both the production, marketing and use of PFAS as such and as components in other substances, in mixtures and in articles.

For a number of uses, the dossier submitters propose time-limited exemptions based on the availability and applicability of alternatives to PFAS. The following exceptions are listed for the textile sector:

- Protective clothing against category III a) and c) hazards : 13.5 years
- Protective clothing for professional firefighting activities against category III a) to m) risks : 13.5 years
- Impregnation agents for re-impregnation of above mentioned protective clothing : 13.5 years
- Textiles for use in filtration and separation media for high-performance air and liquid applications in industrial or professional environments requiring a combination of water and oil repellency : 6.5 years

For a number of essential textile applications such as protective clothing for armed forces (army, police), high-visibility clothing, medical textiles, etc., no exception is foreseen for the time being. There may be other applications in the textile sector for which there is currently no full alternative to the use of PFAS.



READ ECHA PROPOSAL



READ EURATEX'S SUMMARY