

PFHxS and PFOA in firefighting foams update and reminder

December 2024

Who we are

We are the Environment Agency. We monitor and enforce controls on certain chemicals in England to protect the environment and human health. We are one of the enforcing authorities for the UK POPs Regulation, relating to controls on chemicals known as Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs).

(Please note: All references to the UK POPs Regulation are to the assimilated EU Regulation 2019/1021 on persistent organic pollutants (recast), as amended.)

Why we are contacting you

We previously contacted you with information regarding the UK POPs Regulation and PFOA firefighting foams. We wanted to let you know that there has been an amendment to the UK POPs Regulation that may affect you if you use and store firefighting foams containing POPs.

You must comply with the legal controls that apply to these foams.

Updates to the UK POPs Regulation

In November 2023, an amendment to the UK POPs Regulation added the chemical perfluorohexane sulfonic acid (**PFHxS**), its salts, and PFHxS-related compounds to the list of restricted substances¹. Like PFOA, PFHxS has also been used in firefighting foams.

For your reference, the UK POPs Regulation is available to view on www.legislation.gov.uk

What you need to do

If your stocks of firefighting foam contain PFHxS above the unintentional trace limit specified in Annex I of the UK POPs Regulation, then you will need to dispose of them as soon as possible, as per the guidance below, and in accordance with your legal obligations.

If you are unsure if your foams contain PFHxS, you should take reasonable steps to ensure you are compliant with the regulations and have managed any risks appropriately. To find out if PFHxS is in your foam, you could, for example, check the safety data sheet, contact the manufacturer/supplier, or have the foam analysed by a suitable laboratory.

Dispose of foam containing PFHxS appropriately

It is important that you manage waste foam appropriately. You must not discharge unwanted POPs firefighting foams to land, water or sewer. You may commit an offence if you do so.

¹ 'Perfluorohexane sulfonic acid (PFHxS), its salts, and PFHxS-related compounds' means the following:

- (i) perfluorohexane sulfonic acid (PFHxS), including branched isomers;
- (ii) its salts;
- (iii) any substance that contains the chemical moiety C₆F₁₃SO₂- as one of its structural elements and that potentially degrades to PFHxS

You must ensure that:

- any contractor you employ to remove the waste is registered as a waste carrier.
- the waste transfer or consignment note clearly indicates the presence of the POPs chemical present.
- you dispose of the waste foam in line with current waste regulations. High temperature incineration (HTI) is the preferred method of disposal.

For further information on your responsibilities see the [Duty of Care code of practice](#).

You should be aware of the potential upcoming amendments, mentioned below, that could affect how you are required to dispose of your waste in the future.

Reminder: PFOA foams

Our guidance previously circulated for PFOA foams is still relevant, but we would like to remind you that the specific exemption that currently permits the use of PFOA foams expires on **4 July 2025**. We will continue working with PFOA stockpile holders in the coming months to ensure proper disposal as the deadline approaches.

For more information on how to register a POPs stockpile, please see:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/persistent-organic-pollutants-notifying-pops-stockpiles

Potential upcoming amendments

We wanted to make you aware that in April 2024 DEFRA published their response to a recent consultation on potential amendments to the UK POPs Regulation. There are a number of proposed changes that relate to both PFOA and PFHxS which may be relevant for your business.

For the full consultation response, see here: [Summary of responses and government response - GOV.UK](#)

Any regulatory amendments that are made, will be available on <https://www.legislation.gov.uk> in due course, and these will be accompanied by updated guidance on gov.uk.

Further support

Further information on the use, storage, and disposal of POPs can be found online at <https://www.gov.uk> by searching “persistent organic pollutants”.

If you have any questions regarding the regulatory requirements, or require compliance advice, please do not hesitate to be in touch via chemicalrestrictions@environment-agency.gov.uk

For queries outside of England, please contact:

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