

# Next Steps for Toxic PFAS “Forever Chemicals”

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**MEDIA  
BACKGROUNDER**  
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Despite the toxicity and widespread use of PFAS, Canada’s toxics laws have not meaningfully dealt with this class of thousands of chemicals, creating a toxic legacy for future generations. Finalizing the PFAS risk assessment, and proposing to list the class as “toxic” under Canada’s Environmental Protection Act (CEPA), are positive steps towards protecting our health—but turning off the PFAS tap will require a final listing order followed by bans and restrictions to get these toxic chemicals out of our products. Consumer products are a significant source of direct exposure to PFAS and they contaminate our drinking water, soils and ecosystems from use through to disposal. The federal government must listen to [PFAS researchers](#), and take urgent action.

## What are “forever chemicals” or PFAS?

PFAS, or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, are a class of thousands of chemicals used in products for their waterproof, stain-proof and non-stick traits, and in manufacturing sectors such as metal plating, pulp and paper, and oil and gas fracking. These substances never break down in the environment, can cause cancer and disrupt hormones, and have been [estimated](#) to cost Canada up to \$9 billion in health care costs annually.

## Where are PFAS found?

PFAS are omnipresent in our everyday lives, and are used in a wide variety of household and industrial products. This includes food packaging, beauty products, mattresses and clothing. Since PFAS don’t break down, they make their way into our food and drinking water, and build up in our bodies.

## Who is responsible for this toxic mess?

Just [twelve chemical companies](#) are the source of global PFAS production and global contamination. Litigation to recover the massive costs of PFAS pollution on the environment and human health have just begun. Class-action lawsuits against these manufacturers have been brought forward by [provinces](#) and [municipalities](#), [US states](#), firefighters and [impacted communities](#). This echoes tobacco and opioid litigation, which resulted in multi-billion dollar claims. PFAS lawsuits will be before the courts for years to come.

## Why haven’t Canada’s governments banned PFAS already?

Coordinated [lobbying by the industries](#) that manufacture, use, and pollute the environment with PFAS has undermined regulatory action. PFAS replacements exist on the market for several product-based applications. Adequate transition timelines reduce impacts on companies

reformulating and removing PFAS from their products, as is happening in the EU regulatory roadmap, where so-called 'essential' and harder-to-substitute applications will have more time to innovate. Hundreds of brands have [already gone](#) PFAS-free, including Levi's, H&M and others.

## What is the federal government doing?

Canada's weaker environmental and consumer protection standards are named by EU member states as [a barrier to trade](#). Canada has spent the past four years assessing the class of PFAS, and it has now finalized its assessment confirming that the class of PFAS are "Toxic Substances", and proposed an Order in Council to list the class as toxic on Schedule 1 under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA). The proposed class listing excludes PFAS that are considered fluoropolymers, including polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), known by the brand name Teflon.

## What PFAS products will be regulated?

Canada's proposed approach for regulatory action is to target PFAS-laden firefighting foams in 2025, and to include cosmetics, paints and coatings, food contact material, and ski wax by 2027. Additional priorities for phaseouts must include all children's products, personal care products, and paper and cardboard, and follow the lead of US states and the EU in their prioritized product- and sector-focused phaseouts.

## Recommendations:

Canada has helped lead the world towards a less toxic future, and that leadership is needed now more than ever. To help address the growing threat posed by PFAS, the Canadian government must:

1. **Quickly finalize the PFAS class listing**, and fast-track its regulatory action.
2. **Prohibit PFAS in products** we use every day—from clothing to personal care products, and immediately finalize the PFOA regulation with comprehensive prohibition in articles.
3. **Support Canadian PFAS-free solutions and products.** Many companies are already demonstrating that PFAS-free is possible, and have begun the process of phasing out PFAS—but voluntary tools are not enough to protect from further PFAS exposures. There are no technical or economic barriers that outweigh the negative impacts of PFAS on our health and environment.
4. **Ensure polluter pays.** Drive investigations, enforcement and accountability measures for PFAS manufacturers, importers, users and polluters, and ensure these polluters pay for the high costs borne by municipalities for contamination cleanups and water treatment. Getting PFAS out of the products contaminating municipal drinking water, wastewater, waste streams, biosolids, and landfills will also mitigate this pollution.

## What are other jurisdictions doing?

Many jurisdictions, such as the EU and in US states, are moving quickly on product-based regulatory action, and phaseouts have already begun—a few examples:

**EU:**

- In February, the EU [finalized a plastic packaging regulation](#) that restricts PFAS.
- Also in February, the French parliament [voted in favour](#) of restricting PFAS.
- The European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) is developing its PFAS restrictions approach, and is currently [examining](#) sealants, textiles, printing, medical applications, packaging and pharmaceuticals along with its previous [investigations](#) of cosmetics, ski wax, metal plating and metal products, textiles, upholstery, leather, apparel, carpets, food contact materials and packaging, petroleum and mining.

**US:**

- Thirty US states have adopted PFAS accountability and phaseout legislation focused on apparel, carpets/rugs, cleaning products, cookware, children's products, dental floss, firefighting foam, food packaging, menstrual products, personal care and cosmetic products.
- US Department of Defense (DOD) stopped purchasing PFAS-based firefighting foams in 2023, and phased them out completely in October 2024.

## What PFAS regulations do the public want to see?

Polling shows that 4 out of 5 people living in Canada want action on [PFAS](#), and are concerned about the health and environmental impacts of this toxic class of chemicals.

Last year, Environmental Defence identified several harmful chemicals in children's products, including [toxic PFAS](#) "forever chemicals" coatings on children's winter gloves. PFAS is one of several toxic substances found to be impacting children's health, and last month [researchers stated](#) that "chemicals and plastics is a major planetary challenge that is worsening rapidly," and that this "endangers the world's children and threatens humanity's capacity for reproduction. Inaction on chemicals is no longer an option."