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# Can we transition to a green economy and deal with the PFAS pollution crisis?

July 3, 2024 By Anna Watson



The climate crisis is one of the greatest challenges of our time, and a rapid transition to a green economy is vital. However, it is essential to make this transition without polluting our environment, bodies and wildlife with more toxic chemicals.

CHEM Trust has, therefore, investigated whether the green transition can be achieved without per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and has found good news: **innovative companies are already creating PFAS-free alternatives.**

## Why do we need a PFAS restriction?

The growing scientific evidence of the harm to people, wildlife and the environment led to five European authorities drafting a restriction proposal for all PFAS. In 2023, the European Chemical Agency (ECHA) published the **universal PFAS restriction dossier** (uPFAS), paving the way for a broad ban on PFAS under the European Union (EU)'s chemical regulation, REACH. The uPFAS dossier proposes to restrict the intentional manufacture, import and use of PFAS in the EU, with years of transition time for various sectors.

The group of over ten thousand chemical compounds is **practically indestructible**; once they contaminate the environment, they will persist in it for generations to come. PFAS have been found all **around the**

**world**, even in the most remote areas, such as the Arctic. They have also been detected in the blood and breast milk of people and wildlife worldwide.

Research is increasingly linking the most well-studied PFAS to **certain cancers, developmental issues, immune system disruption, and other serious health conditions**.

## PFAS use in “green” technologies

The EU has committed to reducing its reliance on fossil fuels and transitioning to a green economy, including by investing in renewable technologies and electric cars. However, some of these technologies use PFAS, including F-gases and fluoropolymers. Due to this expected growth in green technology, the PFAS emissions associated with this technology are also predicted to increase. Based on the assumptions regarding PFAS usage trends, **a more than 1000% increase in PFAS emissions from 2025 to 2050 just for the electronic and semi-conductor sector is predicted** (see Annex E, section E.2.11. of the **restriction proposal**).

At CHEM Trust, we take the claims that PFAS are needed for the green transition very seriously because tackling climate change is one of the biggest challenges of our times. This is why we looked into whether PFAS-free alternatives in green transition sectors are available. **And there is good news: innovative companies are creating PFAS-free alternatives, bringing us closer to a PFAS-free economy.**

Innovation to find PFAS-free alternatives is taking place in:

- Solar cells
- Wind turbines
- Electric vehicles
- Heat pumps
- Semi-conductors

**Read our FAQ briefing** for more information about which PFAS chemicals are used in which applications, the alternatives, and the costs of PFAS pollution.

An increasing number of companies are looking to move away from PFAS. For example, over 100 companies, including green technology companies, have signed up for the **“No PFAS Corporate Movement”**, organised by the Swedish NGO, ChemSec. These companies are making a dedicated effort to move away from PFAS in products, technologies and supply chains.

Dr Shubhi Sharma at CHEM Trust said:

*“We should tackle climate change and PFAS pollution together, not address one by making the other worse. Fortunately, several PFAS-free alternatives for green technologies are either*

*already available or are being researched, leading to innovation.*

*Once adopted the proposed EU PFAS restriction currently allows certain sectors up to 13 years to find alternatives. We know that companies are already embracing the challenge of going PFAS-free and that a ban on PFAS is compatible with the essential clean technologies needed to avert climate change.*

## Recommendations

CHEM Trust **supports** the current restriction proposal to **achieve a PFAS-free economy in the EU** by the end of all transition periods. This is the most efficient way to prevent the replacement of one harmful PFAS chemical by another and reduce PFAS emissions to a minimum, protecting present and future generations from the irreversible impacts of PFAS contamination.

We also urge companies to start taking action to remove PFAS in their products and supply chains and share knowledge and inspiration so that we can end our reliance on PFAS chemicals. Joining ChemSec's "**No PFAS Corporate Movement**" would be a first step.

Tagged With: EU policy, PFAS, POPs

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