# UK faces scrutiny over 'forever' chemicals and health implications



The presence of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), commonly referred to as ‘forever’ chemicals, has come under intense scrutiny in the UK as concerns grow regarding the potential health implications and the adequacy of current regulations. These chemicals, known for their durability and resistance to decomposition, are prevalent in a wide array of everyday products, including non-stick frying pans, make-up, and waterproof clothing.

Recent studies, including a comprehensive review of 500 research papers, have highlighted alarming links between PFAS exposure and serious health issues, such as immune system weakening and an increased risk of cancer. In light of these findings, the Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) is preparing to make recommendations regarding the need for stricter regulatory measures surrounding these toxic substances, with a report expected to be presented to the UK Government before the end of the year.

Concerns have emerged over the significant regulatory disparity between the UK and the European Union regarding PFAS. Campaigners argue that the existing measures in the UK are insufficient, leading organisations like Chem Trust to issue warnings about a potential ‘chemical pollution crisis’. They stress the importance of addressing this regulatory gap to prevent further harm from synthetic chemicals.

Recent reports, including one from The Mail on Sunday, have drawn attention to expert opinions suggesting that the rise in conditions such as endometriosis among women and declining fertility rates in men may be linked to PFAS exposure. These assertions have raised the alarm among health advocates, prompting calls for urgent action.

In October 2023, the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) initiated a campaign advocating for an overhaul of the UK’s drinking water standards after analysing testing results that revealed more than a third of water courses in England and Wales contain medium or high-risk levels of PFAS. Speaking on this initiative, Stephanie Metzger, an expert in sustainable chemicals policy at the RSC, stated, “While chemical scientists race to develop alternative materials, robust controls are essential to limit further pollution. We welcome the EAC’s inquiry – especially as the UK lags behind some other countries.”

Additionally, survival expert Bear Grylls has spoken out about the concerning presence of these chemicals in tap water, further emphasising the urgency of the issue.

Toby Perkins MP, chair of the EAC, acknowledged the growing media attention on PFAS, asserting, “News coverage has exposed the level of problems with PFAS, and has shone a light that the UK’s regulatory approach is far less active than in many jurisdictions.”

The rising scrutiny of PFAS signifies a critical juncture in public health and environmental policy in the UK, as experts and advocacy groups continue to push for enhanced regulations to safeguard against potential health risks associated with these enduring chemicals.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/european-zero-pollution-dashboards/indicators/risk-of-pfas-in-humans> - This URL supports the claim about PFAS being harmful to human health and their widespread presence in everyday products. It highlights health risks associated with PFAS exposure in European populations, aligning with concerns raised in the UK.
* <https://www.research.uky.edu/news/uk-researchers-community-partners-tackle-health-threats-forever-chemicals> - This link corroborates the health risks associated with PFAS exposure, such as cancer and other serious health issues. It also underscores the need for stricter regulations, which is echoed in UK discussions.
* <https://www.pfasfree.org.uk/about-pfas> - This webpage discusses the harmful effects of PFAS, including their impact on reproductive health and the environment. It advocates for aligning UK regulations with EU standards to address the regulatory disparity mentioned in the article.
* <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/04/22/2024-07496/guidance-for-federal-financial-assistance> - Although not directly related to PFAS, this government website can be used to understand the broader context of regulatory challenges and standards in managing environmental pollutants.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This is the source of the original article, but it does not provide independent corroboration of specific claims. Instead, it presents a summary of concerns and actions related to PFAS in the UK.