Guidance Note

Fire Industry Association

Leading Excellence in Fire Since 1916

FIA Guidance: PFAS in Firefighting foams Restrictions Update October 2024

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1. Current situation

In the UK there is currently no legal restriction on the supply or refilling of current fluorotelomer based (C-6) AFFF in fire extinguishing applications including fire extinguishers.

By way of background since at least the last ten years, all AFFF has been based on fluorotelomer chemistry which does not contain PFOS/PFOA (C-8) or PFHxS. Prior to that date AFFF was likely to contain PFOS/PFOA. PFHxS was not used in firefighting foams.

PFOS/PFOA/PFHxS are chemicals covered by UK and EU REACH & POPS (Persistent Organic Pollutants) Restrictions which ban their use at certain concentrations. The concentrations of these chemicals in AFFF used in fire extinguishing applications is above that threshold. PFOS and PFHxS are already banned, PFOA will be banned from 4 July 2025.

Refilling extinguishers or fixed systems which have contained PFOS/PFOA/PFHxS with fluorotelomer foam will not make them exempt from the PFOS/PFOA/PFHxS bans. This is because they will still contain trace amounts of the chemicals above the prescribed limits.

2. Definitions

PFAS
Per & poly fluorinated substances - the generic term for all fluorinated compounds including fluorotelomer foams
PFOS
Perfluorooctane sulfonate
PFOA
Perfluorooctanoic acid
PFHxA
Perfluorohexanoic acid
PFHxS
Perfluorohexanesulphonic acid
POPs
Persistent organic pollutants - POPs are regulated worldwide by the Stockholm Convention and the Aarhus Protocol.

3. Going forward

3.1 EU

ECHA the EU body for REACH restrictions are proposing 2 REACH restrictions that would ban PFAS in firefighting foams in the EU.

The first of these which covers applications of PFHxA, (EU) 2024/2462 and was published in the Official Journal of the EU on 19 September 2024. This is the date of entry into force.

Although PFHxA (the main C6 breakdown chemical) would effectively cover all current firefighting foams the restriction limits itself to 3 specific applications of PFHxA two of which involve firefighting foams"

- Textiles and from 10 October 2027 it is banned in amounts over 25ppb but does not apply to PPE covered by the PPE Regulation
- Firefighting foam for training and testing and Public FRS (except COMAH sites i.e. industrial chemical sites) from 10 April 2026 it is banned in amounts over 25ppb.
- Firefighting foams for Civil aviation from 10 October 2029 is banned in amounts over 25ppb.

It doesn't cover portables and fixed systems as they are covered by the firefighting foam restriction which has yet to be published.

It doesn't impact UK other than for export purposes and influencing the DEFRA/HSE consultation process for the UK restriction.

3.2 UK

In the UK DEFRA/HSE have started a consultation for a UK REACH restriction on PFAS in firefighting foams. They are currently consulting industry, and a public consultation will be held next year.

It is unlikely that any UK restriction will be in place prior to 2026. Any transition periods would likely be similar to those in the proposed EU restriction i.e. 18 months for firefighter training/system testing and Municipal Fire Brigades (except use at large industrial sites), 5 years for portables, marine uses, aviation and defence, 10 years for offshore, and major industrial sites (COMAH/Seveso III). It is unlikely that we'll see any total ban for all applications prior to 2030 at the earliest.

4. Impact of Restrictions

Note any total PFAS ban would impact on any waterbased extinguishers that contain PFAS e.g., AFFF, wet chemical and some water additives.

As with previous such bans, we would expect there to be considerable supply-side issues as manufacturers clear stock, move to new fluorine free product, etc.

Many manufacturers/suppliers have already moved away from fluorinated foam production hence making refill and purchase complicated and risky for the operational sustainability of the existing foam systems in case of activation.

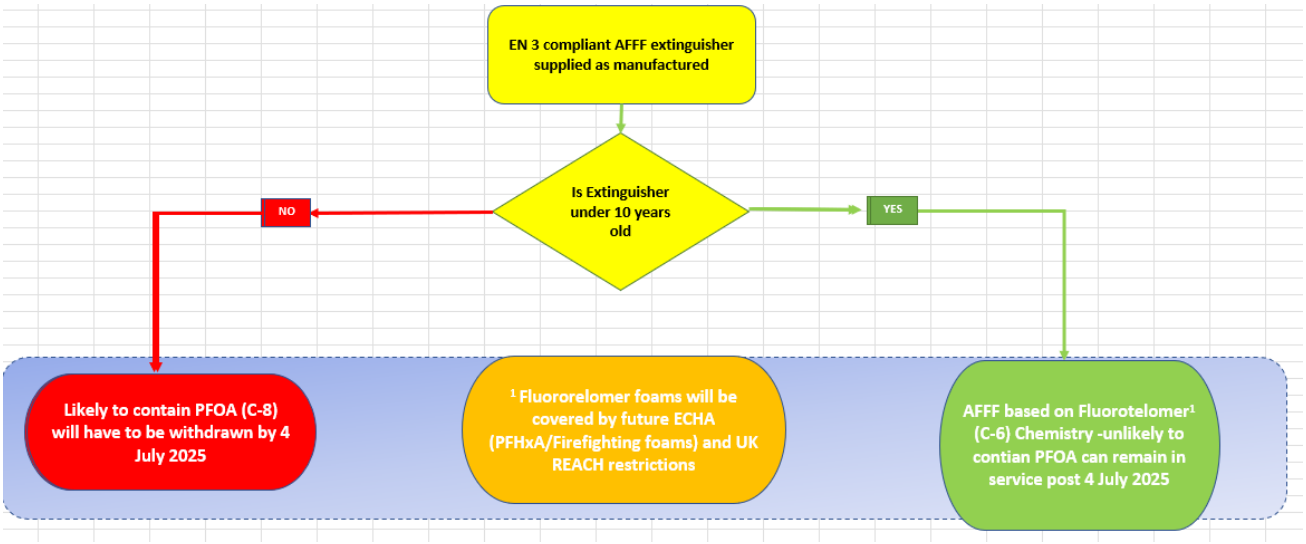
There will also be increased demand for disposal of extinguishers containing restricted agents.

This would likely have significant impact on the market and end users and their suppliers should be mindful of this.

5. FIA Position

We (FIA) are recommending people start to plan for a move to fluorine free agent, but there is no legal requirement yet. If doing so, please check equivalent fire testing approvals and application rates for the fuels being stored/used in bulk, to ensure your fire safety is not being unintentionally compromised. When dates are confirmed, FIA will issue more precise guidance.

6. Summary PFOA in portable fire extinguishers



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