

Information for Suppliers of Foam Fire Extinguishers

Restrictions on PFOA Chemicals in Foam Fire Extinguishers

What are PFOA chemicals and why is their use now restricted by the UN and within the EU?

PFOA (Perfluorooctanoic Acid) is part of a larger group of chemicals known as PFAS (Per- and Poly-Fluoroalkylated Substances). These chemicals have many uses such as for stain and water-repellent coatings on fabrics **and in firefighting foam**, including potentially the foam used in some handheld fire extinguishers. This information leaflet covers the chemical in this group called PFOA - which is now known to pose serious risks to human health and the environment. When we refer to restrictions it is essentially a ban that was imposed on PFOA chemicals in 2020 at a worldwide level under a global UN treaty called the Stockholm Convention. This treaty aims to protect human health and the environment from persistent organic pollutants¹.

What are the restrictions on PFOA in fire extinguishers?

The use of PFOA is restricted globally in fire extinguishers under international and EU law (since 4th July 2020)². Its use must be phased out over the next few years.

- Firefighting foam placed on the EU market must now contain **less than 0.025 mg/kg of PFOA**³.
- Firefighting foam containing PFOA at levels higher than this limit **cannot be supplied or imported into/exported from** the EU. Firefighting foams containing PFOA (higher than the limit above) that were **already installed in your customers premises** before the PFOA restrictions came into force on 4th July 2020 can still be used, but only until 4th July 2025, and **only under the strict conditions** outlined in EU law⁴. This includes:

¹Further background information on PFOA/PFAS can be found on the [EPA PFAS webpage \(https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/waste/chemicals/pfas/\)](https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/waste/chemicals/pfas/)

²PFOA is restricted under the EU Persistent Organic Pollutants Regulation (2019/1021) as amended by (EU) 2020/784 and the Irish POPs Regulations S.I. No. 146/2020.

³A list of PFOA and PFOA-related chemical substances is available on the EPA webpage (<https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/waste/pfoa-concentration-of-selected-foams.php>) While the allowed concentration for PFOA is <0.025 mg/kg, the limit for all other PFOA substances is 1 mg/kg.

⁴The legal conditions under which the use of foam fire extinguishers containing PFOA is now allowed are set out in Regulation (EU) 2020/784.

- ✓ Use PFOA foam fire extinguishers **only** on fires involving flammable liquids - also known as Class B fires.
- ✓ All PFOA-foam waste must be collected & managed as hazardous waste by an appropriate waste management company. Once the extinguishers are decontaminated appropriately, they can be recycled or used again.
- ✓ All PFOA-foam stocks greater than 50 kg must be reported annually via the Persistent Organic Pollutants module in the EPA's EDEN portal (edenireland.ie)⁵

- ✗ Do not use PFOA foam fire extinguishers for training.
- ✗ Do not use PFOA foam fire extinguishers for testing unless all releases of foam can be contained.

What can suppliers do to help and ensure compliance?

You can assist our efforts to find out which foams may contain PFOA, by contacting your foam suppliers to obtain proof their foams do not contain PFOA. The information you need from your supplier is a recent test report showing the analysis of the PFOA content of the foam, and if detected, what the level of PFOA was in the foam. Remember, even if PFOA is not used directly to manufacture the specific foam fire extinguisher product, it can be present unintentionally at low levels because of the manufacturing process using other PFAS. Therefore, testing is required, and it is not enough to say PFOA was not used to produce the foam.

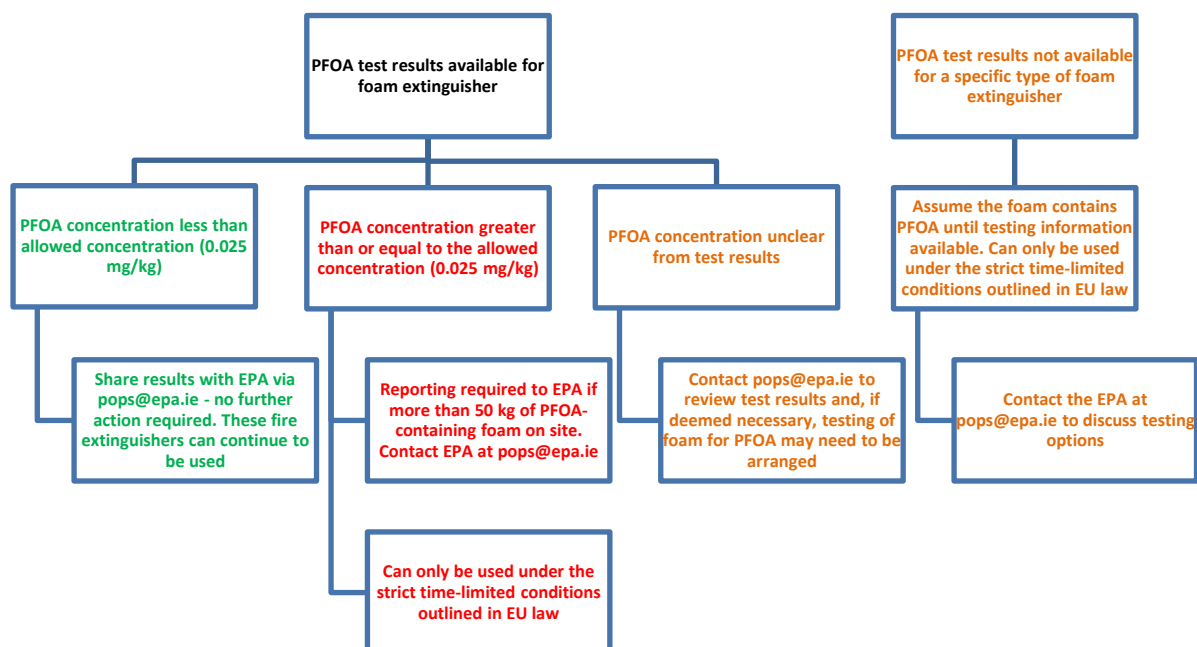
You will find information on the EPA website about the PFOA content of some foams⁶ and examples of PFOA/PFAS-free foams⁷. Suppliers and manufacturers of foams should have more information on alternatives available.

⁵Further information on reporting PFOA foam can be found in the EPA's frequently asked questions (<https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/waste/faqs-on-pfoa-foam-reporting-stockpiles.php>).

⁶ <https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/waste/pfoa-concentration-of-selected-foams.php>

⁷ <https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/waste/examples-of-fluorine-free-foams.php>

The following chart will guide you as a supplier to what your next steps should be having received the test results.



The EPA has also issued an information leaflet for users. This and other up-to-date information on PFOA in foam fire extinguishers can be found on the [EPA PFAS webpage](#). Note also that while there is a proposal under review within the EU to ban all PFAS in fire-fighting foams, including in foam fire extinguishers, a decision on this is not currently due for a period of time – for further details refer to the [ECHA website](#). Further information will also be available on the EPA website as it becomes available.

The EPA is also engaged with key stakeholders including the industry body (Fire Industry Association of Ireland) to provide guidance and to find out which foams contain PFOA and, if so, at what levels to ensure compliance with these restrictions.

Please note that another group of PFAS chemicals called PFOS (Perfluorooctanesulfonic Acid) have been restricted globally since 2009 and should not be present in any foam fire extinguishers.