

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)

PFAS is a large group of synthetic chemicals containing carbon-fluorine bonds, which are one of the strongest chemical bonds in organic chemistry. This resistance benefits various uses in several industries but causes accumulation in the environment, drinking water and food as well. For this reason, they are also called “forever chemicals”. In addition, some group members exhibit direct harmful characteristics to human health. Without legal interference it is assumed that the level of a reversible contamination will be exceeded.

Some PFAS are already subject to chemical control measurements. For example, the Stockholm Convention, which has banned PFOS, PFOA and potentially PFHxS via the Regulation (EU) 2019/1021 on persistent organic pollutants (POP). Other examples are the restriction under Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006 (REACH) for Perfluorinated carboxylic acids (C9-14 PFCAs), their salts and precursors which are restricted in the EU/EEA since February 2023, or the Regulation (EU) No 517/2014 on fluorinated greenhouse gases aiming to reduce emissions of several PFAS mentioned in its Annexes. Further steps are expected to follow to close the gap of the already regulated PFAS to the whole group as the accumulative properties are characteristic to all PFAS.

The European Union proposed a draft to further restrict PFAS under REACH. The proposal addresses the chemical structure of PFAS, thereby including every existing and potential future PFAS to avoid regrettable substitution. If the restriction comes into effect, approximately 10.000 substances are no longer allowed to be manufactured, placed on the market, or be used in a mixture or article, without thresholds and a limited amount of derogation for specific uses. The broad restriction is not yet in force. The public consultation of the Annex XV report received 5.600 comments from stakeholders. It is expected that the proposal draft will be adjusted accordingly to achieve a more realizable restriction. Considering the excessive number of comments, the final restriction proposal is estimated to take longer than usual. The European Commission then has to discuss the proposal, leaving the estimated earliest date to comply in 2026.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of America established a PFAS Strategic Roadmap from 2021 to 2024 with the aim to research, restrict and remediate PFAS. In January 2024, EPA finalized a significant new use rule (SNUR) that strengthens the regulation of PFAS by preventing anyone from resuming manufacture or processing of inactive PFAS (329 substances) without EPA review of the significant new use. In October 2023 Section 8 of TSCA added the PFAS Reporting Rule. Companies located in the United States are required to inform EPA about their uses of PFAS since 2011. The reporting period is starting in November 2024 and lasts till May or November 2025, depending on company size.

Stäubli Electrical Connectors is aware of the global focus on PFAS and observes the legal requirements closely. To preserve the ability to supply STÄUBLI implements necessary actions in a timely manner.