



How to communicate about PFAS to your customers



NGO ChemSec’s initiative the PFAS Movement rallies companies that call on policy-makers to impose an efficient and comprehensive ban on all “forever chemicals”, and share the ambition of phasing out PFAS from consumer products.

PFAS is the collective name for a group of 5,000 man-made chemicals with hazardous properties, used in many consumer products and often called “forever chemicals”, due to their extreme persistence. Studies have found links between PFAS exposure and a number of health and environment issues.

This guide is aimed at the PFAS Movement’s current and future members, providing the dos and don’ts of communicating about PFAS, which many companies find challenging. Enjoy and put the guide to good use!

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Create demand by informing your customers

Many companies wait until a PFAS chemical is banned to replace it, and are reluctant to phase out “forever chemicals” altogether. One of the major reasons for this is that there is still no overwhelming demand for PFAS-free products.

“Globally, sustainability is rated as an important purchase criterion for 60 percent of consumers.”

Source: The Global Sustainability Study 2021

“Free from PFAS” is a major selling point, available for frontrunner brands and retailers to profit from, but customers can’t demand something they don’t know exists – or why they should demand it.

So, although PFAS and the hazards associated with these chemicals is starting to become common knowledge, you still need to inform your customers about the dangers of “forever chemicals”, and the importance of choosing products free from PFAS.

Don't wait until you're done – show your progress

Transparency builds trust and strengthens brand reputation. If you don't communicate your work on PFAS, people are going to assume that you're not doing anything.

Some of the companies in the PFAS Movement have no products containing PFAS in their portfolio, some still have a bit to go, and some are just starting out.

No matter where you are in the process, you're welcome into the Movement. What matters most is your ambition, and commitment in calling for efficient and comprehensive regulation on PFAS as a group.

“The relative importance of sustainability during the purchase process will continue to increase. Today, 50 percent of consumers rank sustainability as a top five value driver.”

Dr. Andreas von der Gathen, co-CEO of Simon-Kucher, The Global Sustainability Study 2021

Customers value transparency, and appreciate honest answers infinitely more than silence or non-responses, even if the answer is disappointing. Inform your customers about where you are in the process, provide timelines and phase-out plans, and answer their questions and concerns honestly.

Educate your staff about PFAS

Communicating your PFAS-free products and work on phasing out “forever chemicals” through your website, social media pages and other channels is important. But it’s equally important to educate your staff about PFAS.

A customer that doesn’t get the answers they need from your sales or support employee regarding the chemical contents of your products is going to walk away.

So, inform your staff about all things PFAS – including the hazardous properties of such chemicals, which of your products are free from PFAS, the difference in product care for PFAS-free items and items containing PFAS, and so on.

If your company is not a member yet, join the PFAS Movement to gain access to useful information and educational material about “forever chemicals”.

Details on how to join can be found in the end of this guide.

39%

of consumers cite poor environmental record as a concern when deciding to buy from a brand.

Source: Global Web Index

DON'T say this about PFAS

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“We follow regulation”

Yes, that is to be expected. Adhering to legislation is the bare minimum when it comes to chemical safety – and anything, really. Or are you suggesting that it’s common for consumer products to break the law?

Considering that only a few of the 5,000 PFAS chemicals available are banned from use, “following regulation” is an incredibly weak statement and obviously nowhere near enough.

“All PFAS are polymers”

Always double-check all your statements about PFAS. Although some PFAS are polymers, others are not. If you include false information in your PFAS communication – whether on purpose or unintentionally – you’re going to lose credibility and people who know a little about “forever chemicals” will lose trust in your brand.

“Our products are PFOA-free”

We sure hope so, as PFOA has been banned since 2019. But PFOA is only one out of 5,000 PFAS chemicals. What chemical are you using instead? Are your products free from PFAS altogether? Then why are you not labelling them as such?

A common, but really bad strategy when one PFAS chemical gets banned is to simply switch to an unregulated “cousin” with similar structure and properties. This is called regrettable substitution, and could result in an even more hazardous chemical being used instead.

“We only use environmentally friendly PFAS”

This is a typical example of greenwashing. There is no such thing as an environmentally friendly PFAS chemical – or human friendly, for that matter. All PFAS are harmful to human health and the environment, which is why we need an efficient and comprehensive group ban.