

PERSISTENT POLLUTANTS

EPA is poised to impose cleanup liability for 2 PFAS

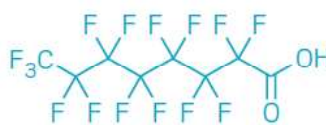
Companies in the US are expected to face new liability this year for cleanup of two widespread per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). In addition, the US Environmental Protection Agency intends to require chemical manufacturers to provide regulators with more data about PFAS production.

PFAS are synthetic chemicals that are highly resistant to degradation, providing qualities such as waterproofing and grease proofing. Though there are thousands of these substances, few have been studied for their health or environmental effects. Some have been found to be highly toxic.

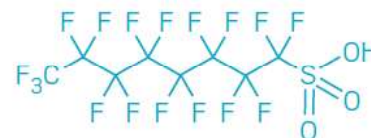
This year, the EPA intends to finalize its designation of two PFAS as hazardous substances under the federal Superfund program for cleaning up sites contaminated with toxic waste, according to an agency report issued in November. The action would affect companies and others that released perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS), including their salts and structural isomers.

Takeaways

- ▶ The EPA intends to establish liability for cleaning up two formerly used PFAS that are widespread pollutants.
- ▶ The agency wants more data from chemical manufacturers about PFAS production and by-products, worker exposure, and disposal methods.



PFOA



PFOS

PFOA and PFOS are contaminants widely found in water, soil, and sediments. Published evidence indicates that they are toxic to humans at very low levels. The two chemicals were formerly ingredients in foams used to extinguish liquid-fuel fires. They also had applications in a number of industrial processes, including the production of fluoropolymers.

The EPA's planned designation would make companies liable for PFOA and PFOS releases. The agency could either require polluters to clean up these substances or could conduct cleanups and recover costs from those responsible for the contamination.

The American Chemistry Council, a chemical industry trade group, opposes the EPA's liability plan, calling it expensive and unworkable.

In addition, the EPA plans to complete a rule this year that would require companies to report on the quantities of PFAS that are produced in or imported into the US or are by-products of manufacture, the agency report says. This regulation would also require companies to provide information about worker exposure to and disposal methods for these chemicals.—CHERYL HOGUE