The Business Case for Eliminating PFAS Chemicals from Consumer Products

The Market Has Already Moved

The business case for eliminating PFAS from consumer products is no longer theoretical — it is being demonstrated daily by companies that have already made the transition and are winning because of it. Across cookware, apparel, furniture, food packaging, and retail, responsible businesses are proving that PFAS-free products are not only commercially viable but increasingly preferred by the customers, institutional buyers, and procurement partners that matter most.

This document makes the case for why eliminating PFAS is sound business strategy, and why the companies moving now are better positioned than those waiting for further regulatory and consumer pressure to force their hand.

The evidence points in one direction: consumer demand backed by science for safer products is growing, third-party certification infrastructure is in place to support and validate the transition, and the legal and financial exposure for companies that delay is compounding. Meanwhile, early movers are capturing market share, strengthening brand story and credibility, and — in some cases — reshaping entire product categories. The question for most businesses is no longer whether to eliminate PFAS, but how quickly and strategically to do so.

Why This Matters Now: Legal, Financial, and Reputational Risk

For companies still using PFAS in their products, the risk calculus has shifted. What was once a regulatory gray area is now an active liability across three fronts.

Legal Liability

Given the legislative and regulatory landscape, companies selling products containing PFAS may face legal liability if those products are sold into jurisdictions where PFAS are restricted, or in cases where harms from exposures can be proven. Companies may also face lawsuits from consumers for selling products containing PFAS, particularly where products were not labeled as such, or for products mislabeled as PFAS-free without testing.



Financial Liability

Companies that produce PFAS are being sued by municipalities and individuals for contaminating drinking water and agricultural soil, and for causing health harms. In 2023, 3M agreed to pay up to $12.5 billion to public water systems affected by PFAS, while DuPont and other chemical companies reached a $4 billion settlement. These actions are not limited to the U.S.. A class action lawsuit in Quebec seeks compensation for past and future costs associated with removing PFAS from water supplies, as well as protection for municipalities and private well owners from financial burdens tied to the contamination.

$16.5 Billion+ in business settlements for PFAS harms.

Reputational Liability

88% of U.S. consumers purchase from brands that align with their values.

17 U.S. states have already restricted PFAS in consumer products.

Today's consumers, especially Millennials and Gen Z, are seeking more than a transactional relationship with companies. According to Givsly,[1] 88% of U.S. consumers purchase from brands that align with their values. Nearly 2 in 3 Americans say they'd be willing to spend more on brands that align with their values across categories, rising to 79% among Gen Z. An article in Forbes reported that 82% of consumers want the values of the brands they buy from to align with their own. That same study showed that three out of four shoppers will part ways with a brand because of a conflict in values.[2] Another study found 66% of shoppers are now seeking out eco-friendly brands, with 55% saying they would pay more for more sustainable products, and a majority of shoppers will not compromise on principles. If there's a value mismatch, 39% of shoppers said they'd permanently boycott their favorite brand, and 24% would break ties at least temporarily.[3]

The regulatory trend is accelerating, not stabilizing. Seventeen U.S. states have already restricted PFAS in consumer products; the E.U. has enacted broad restrictions across packaging, textiles, cosmetics, and cookware. Companies that delay transition face compounding costs: retrofitting supply chains under regulatory deadlines is more expensive than proactive reformulation, and the reputational damage from being identified as a PFAS holdout is harder to reverse than the liability itself.

[1] The Rise of Conscious Consumers - Givsly
[2] Consumers Aren't Just Buying Products. They Are Investing In Values-Forbes, 2025
[3] New Research Shows Consumers More Interested in Brands' Values than Ever | Consumer Goods Technology, 2022

What Are PFAS?

Perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a class of man-made chemicals containing fluorine atoms and carbon atoms. The exact definition of PFAS has varied,[4] however, the widely accepted definition of PFAS, which includes PFOA and PFOS, adopted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), is "...a class of fluorinated organic chemicals containing at least one fully fluorinated carbon atom."[5] A fully fluorinated carbon atom is one that is attached only to fluorine atoms and other carbon atoms.

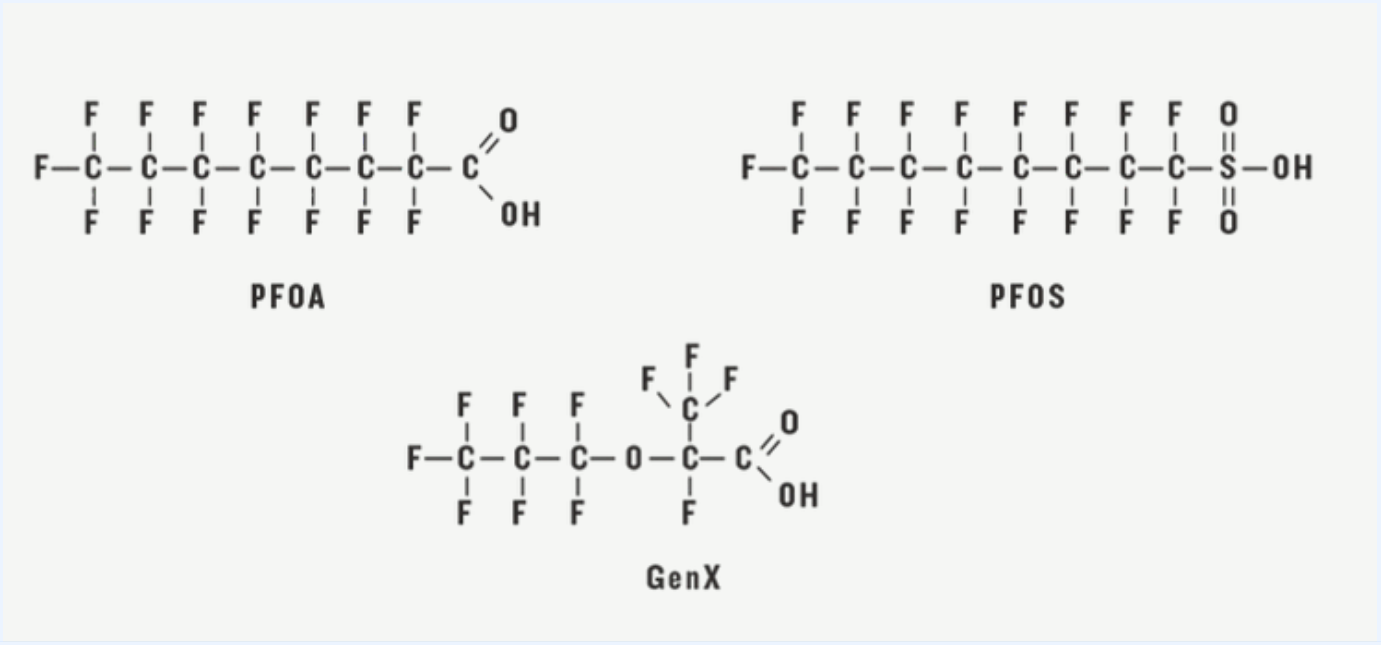


Figure 1: Examples of PFAS. C=carbon, F=fluorine, H=hydrogen, O=oxygen, S=sulfur. Image downloaded from Ensia.

How PFAS Are Used

PFAS are characterized by their low chemical reactivity. Substances that normally stain do not react with PFAS. Water will not "wet" PFAS. This is why some manufacturers use PFAS as a "non-stick" coating for cookware, a grease-resistant barrier for food packaging, and a stain- and moisture-repellent for clothing, upholstery, and carpeting. Because they will not stick to surfaces, PFAS are also lubricants. The carbon-fluorine bond is so strong that PFAS do not burn until they reach very high temperatures, so they are also used to fight fires.



[4]Zhanyun Wang, Andreas M. Buser, Ian T. Cousins, Silvia Demattio, Wiebke Drost, Olof Johansson, Koichi Ohno, Grace Patlewicz, Ann M. Richard, Glen W. Walker, Graham S. White, and Eeva Leinala, *A New OECD Definition for Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances*, Environmental Science & Technology 2021 55 (23), 15575-15578
[5]*Ibid.*

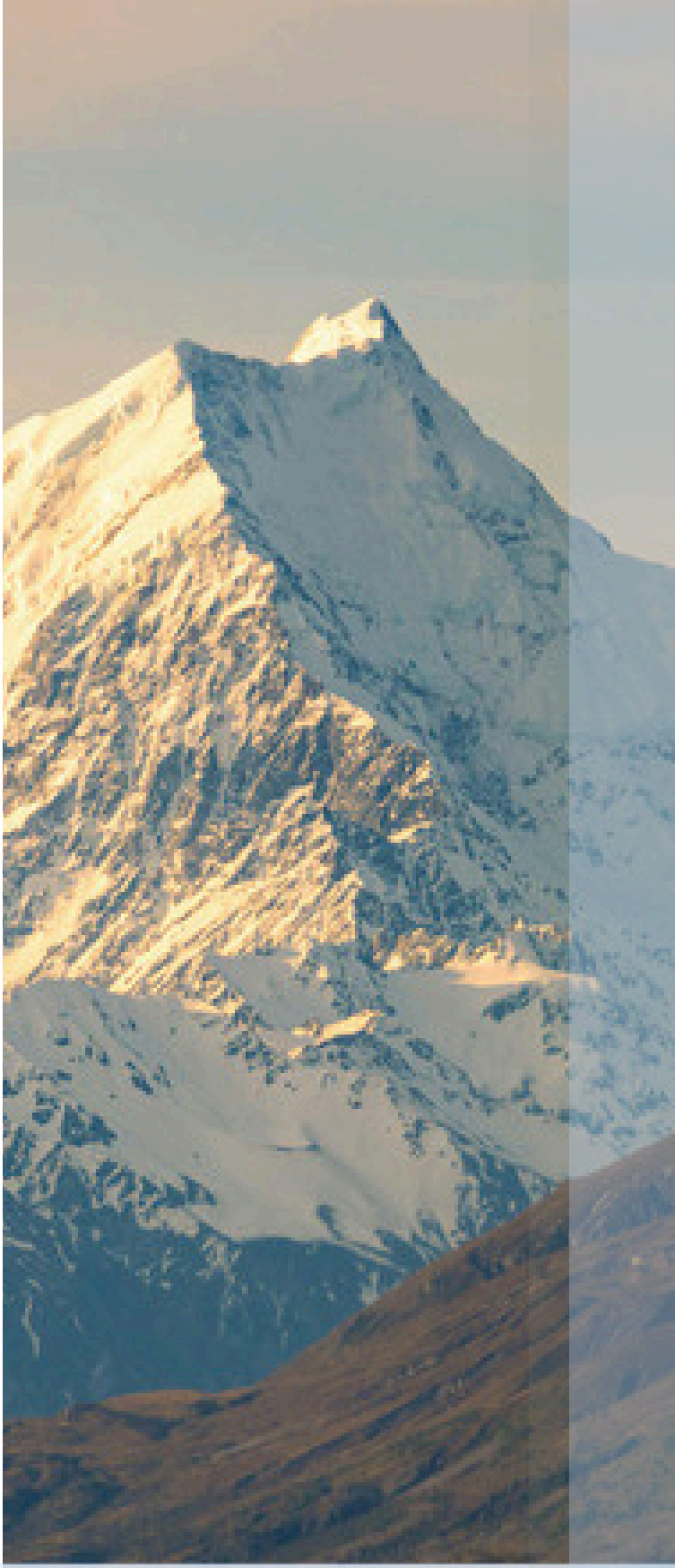
Health and Environmental Concerns About PFAS

Unfortunately, these chemicals have a significant dark side. PFAS are harmful to human health and are associated with a variety of negative health effects, including altered immune and thyroid function, liver disease, lipid and insulin dysregulation, kidney disease, adverse reproductive and developmental outcomes, and cancer.[6]

Both epidemiological and experimental animal data exist for many of these effects.[7] Given these human health impacts, the properties that make PFAS useful, their lack of chemical reactivity and their non-stick nature, now become liabilities.

These chemicals travel rapidly through the environment, where they will persist for centuries. PFAS have been detected in rain, snow, groundwater, tap water, lakes, rivers, soils, and sediments. They are ubiquitous in the environment throughout the world.[8] Given their proven harms to human health and the environment, ubiquity, and resistance to breakdown, it is vitally important that PFAS uses and emissions be rapidly restricted.[9]

PFAS also undermine circular economy goals. For example, food packaging papers containing PFAS are not acceptable for composting.[10] Neither are they suitable for a linear economy as they leach from landfills and contaminate surrounding surface water and ground water, both of which are often used as drinking water.[11] All landfills leak, and burning PFAS releases them into the air. Presently, there is no safe way to use or dispose of these chemicals.



[6]Fenton SE, Ducatman A, Boobis A, DeWitt JC, Lau C, Ng C, Smith JS, Roberts SM. Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substance Toxicity and Human Health Review: Current State of Knowledge and Strategies for Informing Future Research. Environ Toxicol Chem. 2021 Mar;40(3):606-630. doi: 10.1002/etc.4890. Epub 2020 Dec 7. PMID: 33017053; PMCID: PMC7906952.
[7]*Ibid.*
[8]Abunada, Z.; Alazaiza, M.Y.D.; Bashir, M.J.K. An Overview of Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) in the Environment: Source, Fate, Risk and Regulations. Water 2020, 12, 3590. https://doi.org/10.3390/w12123590
[9]Environ. Sci. Technol. 2022, 56, 16, 11172–11179
[10]BPI - Fluorinated Chemicals
[11]Fabrizio Sabba, Christian Kassar, Teng Zeng, Synthia P. Mallick, Leon Downing, Patrick McNamara, PFAS in landfill leachate: Practical considerations for treatment and characterization, Journal of Hazardous Materials, Volume 481, 2025, 136685, ISSN 0304-3894, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhazmat.2024.136685.

Legislative and Regulatory Restrictions on PFAS

The regulatory landscape is no longer emerging — it is established and expanding. The E.U. has enacted legislation to restrict PFAS in packaging, textiles, cosmetics, cookware, other consumer products, and firefighting foam. Specific PFAS have been listed as persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and restricted for use under the Stockholm Convention.[12]

In the U.S., the EPA has set maximum contaminant levels for PFOS and PFOA in drinking water,[13] and seventeen states have restricted the use of PFAS in consumer products, including apparel, carpets, cookware, dental floss, food packaging, personal care products, and ski wax (specific restrictions vary by state), as well as firefighting foam and firemen's turnout gear.[14]

Responsible businesses support the regulation of PFAS to:

- Provide a level playing field for companies that choose to manufacture, distribute, and sell PFAS-free products to compete with companies that do not factor human health and the environment into their decisions, which in turn have negative economic impacts.
- Drive innovation and market expansion of PFAS- free products.
- Increase consumer trust in the marketplace by letting them know which products are PFAS-free.

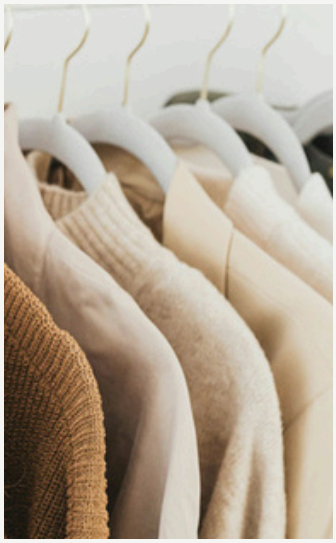
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The Business Response

Products Without PFAS

Recognizing consumer demand and regulatory pressure, companies across a range of industries have moved to eliminate PFAS from their products. The transition is further supported by third-party certification programs that provide market differentiation.






[12] Stockholm Convention - Home page
[13] EPA Announces It Will Keep Maximum Contaminant Levels for PFOA, PFOS | U.S. EPA
[14] State Action on PFAS in Consumer Products - Safer States



Certification and Safer Product Standards

Companies with products **MADE SAFE** or **MADE WISE** Certified do not use any known, intentionally added PFAS in products. Spanning personal care to household, furniture to clothing categories -- these MADE SAFE, and MADE WISE Certified goods prove that it's possible to make excellent products without using “forever chemicals.” Click here for a list of companies working this way or view their product catalog here.

Clean Production Action’s **GreenScreen for Safer Chemicals** is another program that certifies products made without forever chemicals. GreenScreen Certified products are free of PFAS and thousands of other chemicals of high concern to human health and the environment. A list of GreenScreen Certified products can be found here.

The **U.S. EPA Safer Choice program** helps consumers, businesses, and purchasers find products that are effective and contain ingredients that are safer for human health and the environment. Safer Choice is an EPA Pollution Prevention (P2) program, which includes practices that reduce, eliminate, or prevent pollution at its source, such as using safer ingredients in products. A list of over 2,000 cleaning products and automotive products free of forever chemicals and many other harmful chemicals can be found here.

Furniture and Carpeting

Health care and large corporate and government purchasers are demanding that products they purchase be free of harmful chemicals, including PFAS. Furniture manufacturers are eliminating stain treatments that contain PFAS chemicals. Companies, including LinkedIn, Genentech, Pacific Gas & Electric, Partners HealthCare, Perkins + Will, signed a pledge to purchase furniture free of many chemicals of concern, including PFAS.[15]

IKEA, Crate and Barrel,[16] and Room & Board[17] have eliminated the use of fluorinated stain treatments, and Home Depot and Lowe's have eliminated PFAS in carpets and rugs.

[115]Center for Environmental Health, https://www.ceh.org/safer_office/
[16]Green Science Policy Institute. Fluorinated Alternatives: Myths versus Facts.
[17]Steve Freeman, Vendor Resource Manager, Room & Board.



Food Packaging and Cookware

PFAS are commonly used in non-stick cookware and as grease- and/or water-barrier coatings in paper food packaging. Retailers and certification agencies have taken action to eliminate PFAS from foodware, including 32 retail chains with more than 150,000 stores and more than $654 billion in sales.[18]

The Biodegradable Product Institute (BPI), which provides third-party certification for compostable foodware products, requires that compostable products be free of intentionally added PFAS chemicals.

The cookware sector offers a particularly instructive example of market disruption in action. Caraway, founded in 2019, built its brand around ceramic cookware independently tested for over 600 types of PFAS — with lab results published publicly. Its growth has been significant enough to prompt a February 2026 federal lawsuit from Groupe SEB and Meyer, the conglomerates behind All-Clad, T-fal, and Rachael Ray cookware — a legal action that itself signals how seriously incumbent industry players are taking the competitive threat from PFAS-free alternatives.[19]

Textiles

PFAS are frequently used in clothing for waterproofing and stain-proofing. Most of the eighty companies that pledged to eliminate eleven chemicals of concern from their products report complete elimination of PFAS.[20] This includes outdoor and fashion companies Nike, North Face, Levi's, H&M, Fast Retailing, Limited Brands, Valentino, Mango, Esprit, Primark and others.

Retailers are taking steps to reduce or eliminate PFAS in products sold in their stores. The level of attainment varies, as summarized by the Toxic Free Future Mind the Store campaign.[21]

[18]https://toxicfreefuture.org/mind-the-store/retailers-committing-to-phase-out-pfas-as-a-class-in-food-packaging-and-products/
[19]*Molly Taft, "This is what the consumer wants: A new lawsuit about PFAS and other 'forever chemicals' is heating up the cookware industry," Fortune, May 19, 2026.*
[20]Greenpeace, July 2018, Destination Zero: Seven Years of Detoxing The Clothing Industry.
[21]Retailer Report Card - Toxic-Free Future_2024

Recommendation and Next Steps

The evidence is no longer ambiguous: continued use of PFAS exposes companies to legal, financial, and reputational risk, while the market for PFAS-free products is expanding and third-party certification infrastructure is in place to support the transition.

Companies that have not yet begun the transition should:

- Conduct a supply chain audit to identify all PFAS-containing inputs and products.
- Engage with certification programs (MADE SAFE, GreenScreen, EPA Safer Choice) to understand the pathway to verified PFAS-free status.
- Monitor state and federal regulatory timelines to prioritize reformulation in the highest-risk product categories and jurisdictions.
- Communicate progress to customers and procurement partners — transparency on this issue is increasingly expected, and voluntary disclosure ahead of regulatory deadlines strengthens brand credibility.

A mix of voluntary action and regulation will continue to shape this landscape. Companies that move proactively are better positioned to influence the terms of that regulation, capture market share from customers seeking PFAS-free options, and avoid the compounding costs of reactive compliance.

Policy in this space is moving fast, and no company should be tracking it alone. Business networks like ASBN provide members with timely updates on state and federal PFAS legislation, connections to businesses that have already navigated the reformulation process, and a collective voice in shaping the regulations that will define this market. Reach out to team@asbnetwork.org to learn more.

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This 2026 edition was written by Martin Wolf, ASBN Advisor on Safer Chemicals & Circular Economy and David Levine, ASBN Co-founder & President, with editorial contributions from Anayana White, ASBN Head of Communications and design by Claire Duncombe, ASBN Communications Contractor. It updates and expands on ASBN's earlier publication on the business case for eliminating PFAS, reflecting the significant shifts in the regulatory landscape, legal liability, and market response that have emerged in the intervening years.

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