



Foodservice Packaging and... Fluorochemicals

Foodservice packaging is made from a wide variety of materials. These products go through rigorous testing to ensure that they meet stringent regulations, ensuring the safe delivery of foodservice items to consumers.

However, there has been some confusion over the safety of some chemicals used in the manufacture of paper foodservice packaging, particularly claims that certain chemicals are "toxic" and dangerous to human health and the environment. The truth is...

- Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a class of over 3,000 synthetic, man-made chemicals. They are also referred to as "polyfluorinated chemicals" (PFCs). There are variations within this large class of chemicals, including their properties, toxicity and intended use.
- Certain PFAS may be used in some paper foodservice packaging items like wraps, food containers and plates to prevent oil, grease and water from leaking through the package onto skin, clothing, furniture, etc.
- Two common sub-categories of PFAS include:
 - "Long chain" or "C8" chemicals, since they have 8 or more carbons in their structure. Perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS) are two examples. It should be noted that PFOA and PFOS — the subject of much attention by regulators, the media and environmental groups — were not used in food packaging applications. In addition, long chain PFAS chemistries were voluntarily phased out and are no longer allowed in the U.S., Canada and other parts of the world.
 - "Short chain" or "C6" chemicals, since they have 6 or less carbons in their structure. Manufacturers of these newer chemicals — like all chemicals that may come in contact with food — submit their specific formulations to the U.S. Food & Drug Administration, Health Canada and other appropriate regulatory agencies for rigorous review. If found to be safe for their intended use, they may be used. Today, there are less than three dozen short-chain PFAS chemicals approved for use in the U.S. and Canada.
- While some paper foodservice packaging may continue to use approved PFAS chemicals, other packaging items may be manufactured without the use of them. As non-PFAS alternatives are introduced, performance, price and market availability are all factors that will impact their broader use and acceptance.
- Recent studies tested for the presence of fluorine to determine whether PFAS was used in food packaging. While the test may be an indicator of the use of PFAS, it does not differentiate between "long chain" or "short chain" PFAS, and it may not provide accurate results.
- All PFAS chemicals are not the same and should not be treated the same. Therefore, calls to remove the entire class of these beneficial chemicals are unfounded.

With all the attention on PFAS, it should be noted that the FDA in 2019 provided comments that stated “the FDA does not have any indication that these substances are a human health concern...”.

Additionally, claims that the use of PFAS will inhibit biodegradability in compostable foodservice packaging is simply false. Compostable foodservice packaging that use PFAS may still be labelled “compostable” if done in accordance with appropriate guidelines like those from the Federal Trade Commission in the U.S. and Competition Bureau in Canada.

For more detailed information, please check out [this page](#) on FDA’s website, along with [this information](#) from the FluoroCouncil.

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