

Risk Reduction

Managing perfluorinated chemicals and the transition to safer alternatives

Objective

Perfluorinated chemicals (PFCs) are a large group of industrial chemicals that have been used since the 1950s as ingredients or intermediates of surfactants and surface protectors for assorted industrial and consumer applications, such as textiles, carpets, fire-fighting foams and metal plating (a full definition of PFCs can be found at www.oecd.org/ehs/pfc). During the last decade, several long-chain PFCs have been recognised as highly persistent, potentially bioaccumulative and toxic. In addition, many PFCs have been detected globally in the environment, biota, human food items as well as in humans.

Since 2000, there has been an increasing interest amongst OECD and non-OECD countries in this particular chemistry, and a trend towards phasing-out the use of some of these PFCs at the international or national level. Jointly with UNEP, OECD is supporting the work of the **Global PFC Group** that brings together experts from developed and developing countries. The Group's activities aim to support the implementation of resolutions of the International Conference on Chemicals Management that aim to "encourage the development, facilitation and promotion of national and international stewardship programmes and regulatory approaches to reduce emissions and the content of relevant PFCs of concern in products and to work towards global elimination, where appropriate and technically feasible."

Outcomes

- ▶ A PFC Web Portal that provides links to key sources of information and is regularly updated: www.oecd.org/ehs/pfc.
- ▶ Surveys of the production and use of PFCs and their releases into the environment (2004, 2006, 2009).
- ▶ A synthesis paper that provides an overview of the major uses, scientific evidence, alternatives and regulatory approaches used.
- ▶ A series of events, workshops and webinars to disseminate information about PFCs and raise awareness.

Benefits for countries & industry

- ▶ Improved information and awareness of the properties of long-chain PFCs in OECD and developing countries;
- ▶ An accelerated transition towards safer alternatives through encouraging regulatory action;
- ▶ Ultimately, improved environment, health and safety;
- ▶ Promote the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) 2020 goal of sound chemicals management globally.