

Food Regulation Standing Committee Statement

Per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and the general food supply

[Last updated 17 November 2021]

In Australia, exposure of the general population to perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) is low and declining, and there is no consistent evidence that this exposure has been harmful to human health.

PFAS have been used since the 1950s in a range of industrial processes, common household products, and some fire-fighting foams. Due to their persistence and widespread presence in the environment, PFAS are found in the blood of people and animals all over the world and are sometimes present at low levels in a variety of food products and in the environment.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) conducted a hazard assessment of PFOS, PFOA and Perfluorohexane sulfonate (PFHxS) and concluded that there is currently no consistent evidence that these chemicals cause any adverse health effects in humans, including people highly exposed occupationally¹. This conclusion is consistent with other international evaluations.

A dietary exposure assessment, literature review and the 24th Australian Total Diet Study (ATDS) conducted by FSANZ (in which two PFAS compounds were screened i.e. PFOS and PFOA) indicated that the risk posed by these chemicals to consumers in the general population is likely to be very low^{2,3}. This finding is also supported by blood studies involving human serum that provide strong evidence of decreasing serum PFOS and PFOA concentrations in the Australian population from 2002. This likely reflects the decline in use of these chemicals in Australia since around 2002^{4,5,6}.

Most recently, the 27th ATDS investigated the levels of 30 PFAS compounds in a range of foods and beverages common to the Australian diet. PFAS compounds were detected in fewer than 2% of all samples tested, at levels well below Australian guidance values. The study concluded that Australian consumers' exposure to PFAS through food and beverages is very low and poses no food safety concerns⁷.

At specific sites where PFAS contamination has been identified, food regulators continue to assist other relevant authorities and stakeholders who are taking action to reduce the exposure of the local community to PFAS and to reduce the level of PFAS in the general environment. These efforts to reduce the levels of PFAS at specific sites will benefit both the local and the wider Australian communities.

For further information please see www.health.gov.au/pfas.

References

1. Food Standards Australia New Zealand. 2017. Hazard assessment report – PFOS, PFOA, PFHxS
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