

France just banned PFAS. Here's why the U.S. hasn't.

French lawmakers approved legislation banning PFAS in cosmetics, ski wax and clothing.

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A rally in Lyon, France, on Feb. 16 about PFAS. (Elsa Biyick/Hans Lucas/AFP/Getty Images)



By [Amudalat Ajasa](#)

The French Parliament has approved a landmark ban on using “forever chemicals” in common products including cosmetics, ski wax and clothing, a move that could reverberate beyond its borders.

These chemicals, known as PFAS, or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, include thousands of compounds manufactured to make products and coatings that repel grease, water, oil and heat. The persistent chemicals are found in hundreds of household items, including nonstick cookware, menstrual products, dental floss and medicines.

Scientists have found PFAS all across the globe, including in remote regions of Antarctica and in the blood of most Americans. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, PFAS exposure can lead to an increased risk of prostate and testicular cancer, low birth weights, high cholesterol, and negative effects on the liver, hormones and the immune system.

In light of these findings, a patchwork of rules has emerged across the United States and the globe.

The French bill, which must be signed into law by President Emmanuel Macron, bans the manufacturing, import and sale of PFAS in covered products by January 2026 and extends to all textiles in 2030, with some exceptions for industrial use and in applications deemed essential for national security.

The legislation, which passed easily in a vote of 231-51, cleared the French Senate last year and has broad public support. PFAS has been detected in the drinking water of many French communities, including Paris. France's action follows restrictions in Denmark, which in 2020 banned the use of PFAS in cardboard and paper food wrapping, including microwave popcorn bags and baking paper. The European Chemicals Agency is analyzing an ambitious proposal to ban the production and use of PFAS across the European Union.

The French legislation "will not protect the health of our compatriots," Eddy Casterman, a member of the French National Assembly who opposed the ban, said in a statement posted on X. "Quite the contrary, it will further burden our industry with new taxes and force the French to consume ever more Chinese and Indian products made with ultra-harmful substances."

France's action contrasts with the more limited approach the United States has taken in regulating these hazardous chemicals.

Last year, the EPA finalized the nation's first drinking water standard for PFAS, limiting six specific PFAS chemicals from a class of thousands. The EPA acted after mounting evidence that exposure to the chemicals can pose a health risk to people at even the smallest detectable levels.

In January, the EPA published a first-of-its-kind study, finding that "forever chemicals" in sewage sludge used as fertilizer on farms across the country pose health risks to farmers, livestock and the environment.

Individual states are responding more quickly to the extensive body of scientific evidence linking PFAS exposure to negative health outcomes, said David Andrews, acting chief science officer at the nonprofit Environmental Working Group.

"In the E.U., companies that manufacture and profit from chemicals must demonstrate their safety before they reach the market," Andrews said. "In the U.S., all chemicals are assumed safe even in the absence of data, placing the responsibility on government regulators and independent researchers to uncover harm."

This “wait and see” approach, he added, has led to widespread contamination.

Thirty states have adopted restrictions on PFAS. Many are modeled after Minnesota’s “Amara’s Law,” which bans the sale of PFAS in 11 consumer product categories beginning this year, requires companies to report PFAS in their products by 2026, and bans nonessential uses in all products by 2032.

“PFAS pollution has reached a critical point, and common-sense restrictions are overdue. The weight of scientific evidence on the harms of PFAS is now overwhelming,” said H  l  ne Duguy, a legal expert at ClientEarth, an international environmental group. Duguy criticized the limited nature of the French bill but applauded officials for taking action. “We need sweeping restrictions on PFAS for consumer and industrial uses now.”