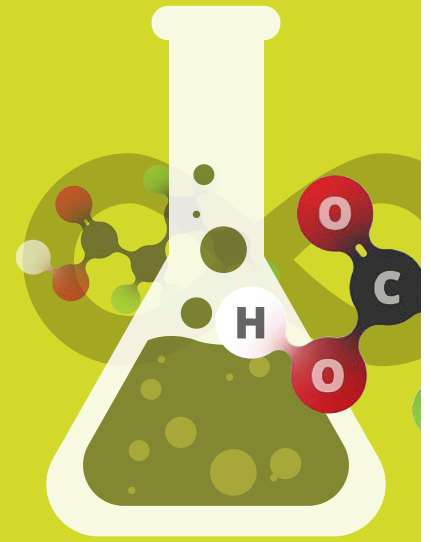




BRIEFING

Chemical reaction: Inside the corporate fight against the EU's PFAS restriction

January 2025



The EU proposal to restrict PFAS – or ‘forever chemicals’ – is at serious risk of being hijacked by corporate lobbying. Industry lobbies from Europe and across the world are targetting the European Commission to protect their PFAS profits from regulation, despite overwhelming evidence of the disastrous human health and environmental consequences of this pollution. Corporate Europe Observatory’s analysis of newly-released documents reveals industry’s influencing tactics, and concludes: it is time for a lobby firewall to protect PFAS decision-making from corporate lobbying.

Background

PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) are chemicals used in our waterproof coats, cookware, and cosmetics. They are also in fridges, air conditioning, and asthma inhalers, as well as in industrial manufacturing. But these man-made chemicals are very hard-wearing and persistent which means they have huge implications for human health, the climate crisis, and the environment. PFAS are in practically all [human bodies](#), even unborn babies, and exposure to PFAS has been [linked](#) to cancer, liver damage, and hormone disruption. PFAS have contaminated our [food](#) and [drinking water](#), are in [most](#) soils and streams, and in the [air](#) we breathe. In 2023 the groundbreaking investigation [Forever Pollution Project](#) identified 23,000 PFAS-contaminated sites just in Europe, with 20 manufacturing facilities and more than 2,100 sites considered to be “PFAS hotspots”.

We can’t afford to clean up PFAS pollution

Decision-makers need to stop this PFAS pollution accumulating further as it is [estimated](#) that otherwise a further 4.4 million tonnes of PFAS will end up in the environment over the next 30 years. The cross-border investigation [‘Forever Lobbying Project’](#) has now calculated that the costs of cleaning up ongoing PFAS pollution, including emerging PFAS, in the next 20 years could be over €2 trillion, with an annual bill of €100 billion per year in perpetuity, unless something is done. With just some health costs for exposure to PFAS across Europe [separately estimated](#) at €52-84 billion per year for potential consequences such as liver damage, decreased fertility, and cancer, it is clear that we need to turn off the PFAS tap.

PFAS lobby battle exposed

Right now, the European Chemicals Agency is examining a proposal to introduce a broad ban on PFAS, with some time-limited exemptions for critical uses of PFAS where there are no adequate alternatives. Eventually the file will pass to the European Commission to prepare a final proposal to be agreed by the EU member states. Corporate Europe Observatory’s new report [Chemical reaction](#) exposes the EU-level lobby battle underway. Our findings include:

- The Commission’s initial ambition to tackle chemical pollution has been downgraded in recent times, with **PFAS industry arguments being adopted at the highest levels in the Commission.**
- **Corporate lobbies have been proactively targetting the Commission**, even though it is only supposed to be an observer at this stage of the process to agree the PFAS restriction. Our survey of 15

European Commission directorate-generals has shown that, not only does the **EU's executive not have any specific measures in place to protect itself from PFAS corporate influence**, in some cases it is **offering firm encouragement to PFAS lobbyists and reassuring indications** about its future decision-making.

- The **corporate lobby campaign is relying heavily upon spin, industry-funded science and studies, scaremongering, and some unsubstantiated claims**. Worryingly many of these arguments have been repeated by politicians and are now framing the political debate on PFAS.
- The PFAS industry's lobby tactics include: **face-to-face lobbying** across the Commission and other EU decision-makers; mobilising allies and **creating echo chambers** to amplify its lobby agenda; **deploying lobby consultancies and law firms**; funding 'impact assessments' and other **industry-favourable studies**; and **promoting voluntary schemes** as part of its opposition to tough regulation.
- **The most prolific corporate lobby on the PFAS restriction is the major producer Chemours** (a spin-off business from DuPont, a company which knew about the health harms of PFAS decades ago) with more high-level meetings on this topic with the Commission than any other group. It has more than doubled its declared lobby expenditure in the past year. The wider chemicals lobby, led by the industry trade associations CEFIC and Plastics Europe, is also clearly very active on the PFAS proposal. **Collectively the biggest PFAS company producers have posted an average increase in declared EU lobby spending of 34 per cent just in the past year**.
- Other particularly **active lobbyists include those from the battery; medical technology and pharmaceutical; semi-conductor and other manufacturing sectors**.
- The PFAS lobby battle is very hot in Germany and **corporate lobbies have found real allies among national and regional politicians**. The **smoke and mirrors position of the federal government on the proposed PFAS restriction is a major concern**, especially in the run up to the national elections.
- The **European Chemicals Agency's public consultation on the PFAS restriction was deluged by business responses**, as a strategic tactic used by the chemicals industry. Some PFAS producers and other industry interests have also been able to lobby agency officials.

Demands

The health and environmental impacts of PFAS pollution show us that a robust PFAS restriction is vital. But we know that the chemicals industry has a long track-record of successfully delaying and weakening rules to restrict harmful chemicals. The parallels with the tactics of the tobacco industry are clear and we need additional lobby rules in place to protect the public interest from toxic lobbying.

Our demands include:

- There should be an **immediate halt to all private Commission lobby meetings on the PFAS restriction with those industry voices demanding exemptions and derogations**. The private and commercial interests pursued by these industry organisations justify such a measure to limit their influence / input. The Commission must also take care not to pre-empt the work of ECHA and remain solely in its observer role.
- The Commission should also **scale up its work on the substitution of harmful substances such as PFAS with safer alternatives**. There is a real risk that the true potential of alternatives to PFAS are not getting the recognition that they need. It should further **review the impact of, and reliance on, industry-sourced studies and data in chemicals policy-making**, and how to boost the sourcing of independent science when regulating chemicals.

Corporate Europe Observatory is among many civil society organisations, academics, and affected communities, supporting a robust PFAS restriction which phases out as many consumer and industrial uses of PFAS as is safely possible, and as quickly as possible. But unless the Commission takes strong action now to protect this decision-making process and others like it, this will simply remain a forever dream, with PFAS pollution continuing to grow into a forever nightmare.

The full report is available at: <https://corporateeurope.org/en/chemical-reaction>

The cross-border investigation 'Forever Lobbying Project' was coordinated by Le Monde and involved 46 journalists and 29 media partners from 16 countries and publishing partner Arena for Journalism in Europe, in collaboration with lobby watchdog Corporate Europe Observatory. The investigation is based on 14,000 previously unpublished documents on PFAS, including those generated by over 180 freedom of information requests.



**Corporate
Europe
Observatory**

Corporate Europe Observatory

Rue d'Édimbourg 26
1050 Brussels – Belgium
info@corporateeurope.org

EU lobby transparency register: 5353162366-85