

Focus on: Alternatives to PFAS in Food Packaging



What are PFAS?

Per- and polyfluorinated substances (PFAS) are a class of synthetic chemicals used in hundreds of applications, including food packaging.

PFAS easily contaminate groundwater because they are water-soluble, highly mobile, and difficult to filter out.

Who is exposed to PFAS?

Everyone.

In recent years, PFAS have been detected in Washington lakes, streams, fish, and drinking water wells.

Why does food packaging contain PFAS?

PFAS helps keep grease, oil, and water from penetrating food packaging, such as paper and paperboard. Common examples include:

- Fast food sandwich wrappers.
- Restaurant take-out boxes.

Washington State will ban PFAS in food packaging

In 2018, the Washington State legislature passed a new law that prohibits all per- and polyfluorinated substances (PFAS) in paper food packaging.

This PFAS ban is part of the [Toxics in Packaging Law \(RCW 70.95G\)](#).¹ In 1991, the Washington State legislature passed RCW 70.95G to limit the amount of four toxic metals (mercury, cadmium, lead, and hexavalent chromium) in packaging sold in the state.

In 2018, this law was amended to add PFAS.

When will PFAS be banned in food packaging?

Safer alternatives to PFAS in food packaging must be available before the ban takes effect. The law requires Ecology to study PFAS in food packaging and assess the safety of alternatives. The ban will take effect January 2022, after we:

- Identify safer alternatives.
- Receive feedback from an external peer review.
- Publish the findings in the Washington State Register.

How do I comment on and stay updated?

Ecology and Department of Health are working together to develop a [PFAS Chemical Action Plan \(CAP\)](#).² The goal of a CAP is to identify the potential health and environmental effects of persistent, bioaccumulative, and toxic chemicals, and recommend actions to reduce or eliminate those impacts.

We have a PFAS CAP listserv where you can receive updates. To subscribe, visit the [CAP Advisory Committee website](#).³ We will host periodic conference calls to share updates on the PFAS AA. Those updates and any documents will be posted on the CAP website.

¹ <http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?Cite=70.95G>

² ecology.wa.gov/PFAS

³ <https://www.ezview.wa.gov/?alias=1962&pageid=37105>

Why should we be concerned about PFAS?

Some forms of PFAS have known toxic effects. Many are or become highly persistent once in the environment.

No natural process can break down PFAS. Exposure to these substances could continue for hundreds of years.

What is an alternatives assessment (AA)?

An AA process finds options that are safer than using a chemical of concern. Options may include:

- Less hazardous chemicals.
- Non-chemical options that achieve the same result.

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Special accommodations

To request materials in a format for the visually impaired, visit ecology.wa.gov/accessibility, call Ecology at 360-407-6700, Relay Service 711, or TTY 877-833-6341.

What are the alternatives to PFAS in food packaging?

Our research indicates there are safer, PFAS-free alternatives for food packaging.

Safer alternatives to PFAS packaging must:

- Meet improved hazard and exposure considerations.
- Be available in quantity and at a similar cost.
- Perform as well or better than current PFAS packaging.

How will Ecology evaluate alternatives?

We will hire a contractor to conduct an alternatives assessment (AA) to identify safer food packaging.

A multi-program team, including the Washington State Department of Health, will review and score the bids of three pre-approved contractors. We will then choose one or more of these contractors to conduct the AA.

After the contractors conduct the AA, we will determine the best alternatives to PFAS packaging based on an item's:

- Chemical hazard.
- Exposure.
- Performance.
- Cost.
- Availability.

Who will review the alternatives assessment?

We will establish an external peer review process as required by law.