

Chemical Information for Users of Foam Fire Extinguishers

What you need to know about PFOA Chemicals in Foam Fire Extinguishers

What are PFOA chemicals and why are they now restricted for use in foam fire extinguishers?

PFOA (Perfluorooctanoic Acid) is part of a larger group of chemicals known as PFAS (Per- and Poly-Fluoroalkylated Substances). These chemicals have many uses such as stain and water-repellent coatings on fabrics **and in firefighting foam**, including potentially the foam used in some handheld fire extinguishers. This information leaflet covers the chemical in this group called PFOA - which is now known to pose serious risks to human health and the environment.

The use of PFOA is restricted globally in fire extinguishers under **international and EU law, since 4th July 2020** - there may be some old units which still contain these chemicals and PFOA can also be present unintentionally in foam due to the manufacturing process¹.

What do I need to do if I have foam fire extinguishers but do not know if they contain PFOA?

If you have foam fire extinguishers on your premises, you need to contact your supplier and ask for testing details to prove whether they do or do not contain PFOA. The proof required is a test report showing that analysis of the PFOA content of the foam was carried out, and if detected, what the level of PFOA in the foam is. It should indicate if the levels found are below or above the legal limits. Remember, even if PFOA is not used in the manufacture of the foam, it can be present unintentionally as an impurity because of the manufacturing process using other PFAS. Therefore, testing is needed even if you are told that PFAS other than PFOA were used to produce the foam. Your supplier should be aware of this requirement. The EPA has also issued an information leaflet for suppliers which can be found on the [EPA PFAS webpage](#)¹. You will also find information on the EPA website about the PFOA content of some foams² and examples of PFOA/PFAS-free foams³. Suppliers and manufacturers of foams should have more information on alternative foams available.

If a foam fire extinguisher does not contain PFOA, or if PFOA is below the allowed concentration of 0.025 mg/kg, then you can continue to use it.

¹Background information on PFOA/PFAS can be found on the EPA PFAS webpage (<https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/waste/chemicals/pfas/>)

²<https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/waste/pfoa-concentration-of-selected-foams.php>

³<https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/waste/examples-of-fluorine-free-foams.php>

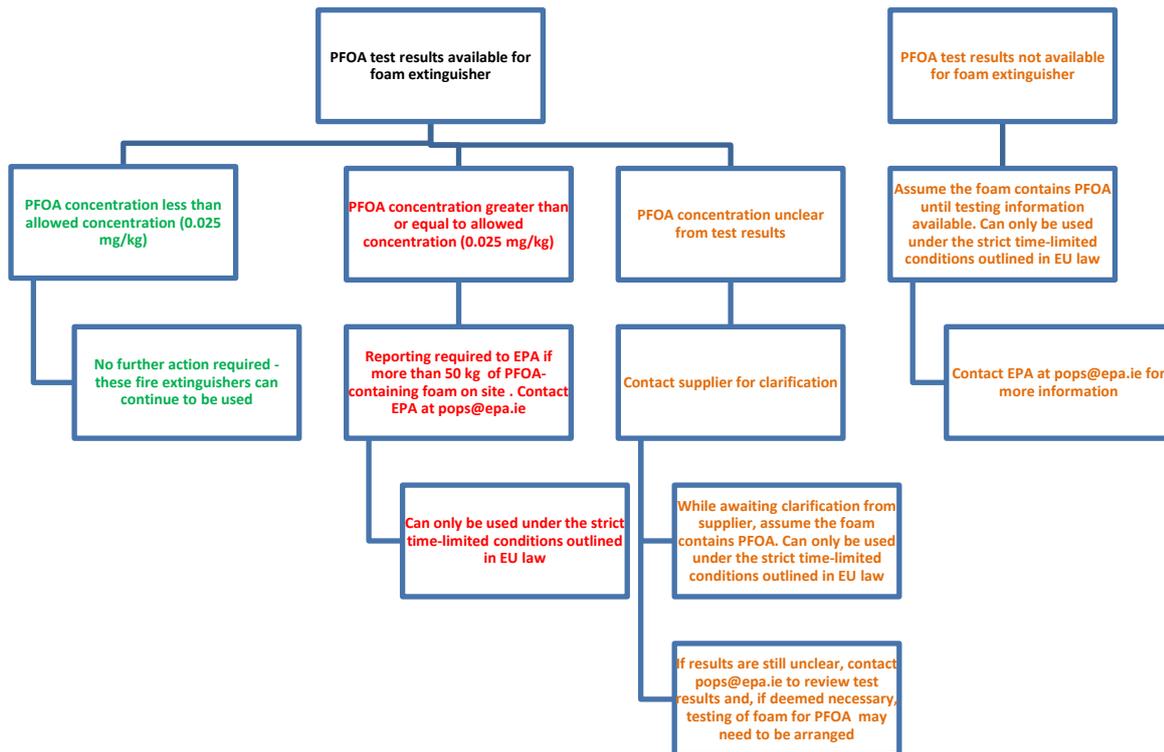
Can I continue to use foam fire extinguishers that contain PFOA?

Yes – You can use fire extinguishers that contain PFOA but only **until 4th July 2025** but there are strict legal conditions, in addition to the normal safety requirements, under which their use is now allowed. These conditions are set out in EU law⁴. This includes the following:

- ✓ Use PFOA foam extinguishers only on fires involving flammable liquids - also known as Class B fires.
- ✓ All PFOA-foam waste must be managed as hazardous waste by a waste management company. Once the extinguishers are decontaminated appropriately, they can be recycled or used again.
- ✓ All PFOA-foam stocks on a premises greater than 50kg must be reported annually via the Persistent Organic Pollutants module in the EPA’s EDEN portal (edenireland.ie)⁵

- ✗ Do not use PFOA foam extinguishers for training.
- ✗ Do not use PFOA foam extinguishers for testing unless all releases of foam can be contained.

The chart below will guide you as a user to what your next steps should be having received the test results from the supplier.



⁴The legal conditions under which the use of foam fire extinguishers containing PFOA is now allowed are set out in Regulation (EU) 2020/784.

⁵Further information on reporting PFOA foam can be found in the EPA’s frequently asked questions (<https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/waste/faqs-on-pfoa-foam-reporting-stockpiles.php>).

- Further Information on PFOA in foam fire extinguishers can be found on the [EPA PFAS webpage](#).
- While there is also a proposal under review within the EU to ban all PFAS in fire-fighting foams, including in foam fire extinguishers, a decision on this is not currently due for a period of time and further details can be found on the [ECHA website](#). Further information on what this will mean for you, will be available on the EPA website as it becomes available.
- Note also that a group of PFAS chemicals called PFOS (Perfluorooctanesulfonic Acid) have been restricted globally since 2009 and should not be present in any foam fire extinguishers.