



UK SUSTAINABLE
FLOORING
ALLIANCE

Info Sheet – EU REACH and UK REACH developments (Apr 2026)

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What is REACH?

REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals) is the European Union's master rulebook for industrial chemicals. If you make or import over one tonne of a chemical, you must register it, share safety data, and accept that regulators can restrict or ban it if risks look too high.

Instead of governments having to prove a chemical is dangerous, REACH pushes more of the burden onto industry to show that it is safe enough for workers, consumers and the environment. Over time, this has made the EU the world's regulatory pace-setter on chemicals, shaping what products global manufacturers can sell into its market.

For flooring, REACH is the framework that governs plasticisers in vinyl, isocyanates in polyurethane, solvents in adhesives, flame retardants in underlays and coatings, and a long list of other substances that give products their flexibility, durability, stain resistance and fire performance but may also carry health or environmental risks.

EU REACH versus UK REACH

When the UK left the EU, it copied REACH into domestic law and rebadged it as "UK REACH". On paper, the structure is similar: the same basic duties to register chemicals, assess risks and comply with restrictions. In practice, the two regimes are drifting apart.

- **Data and timing:** The UK no longer has automatic access to the EU's huge REACH database. To avoid forcing firms to buy or recreate all that data at once, the government has repeatedly pushed back the deadlines for full UK registrations and is exploring a lighter "alternative transitional registration model".
- **Level of protection:** Brussels is pressing ahead with new restrictions under its Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability—tightening rules on groups such as **PFAS** "forever chemicals", certain phthalates, formaldehyde and other substances relevant to flooring materials. The UK, by contrast, has been slower to add new restrictions and classifications, creating a view that UK protections could be falling behind EU standards.
- **Regulatory philosophy:** The EU is leaning into a more precautionary, hazard-based approach, especially for **substances of very high concern** (SVHC). The UK is signalling a more "pragmatic" and industry-friendly stance, with greater emphasis on cost, proportionality and avoiding duplicate testing. (UK list of SVHC – correct at 24/3/26).

For a UK flooring business, this means living with two overlapping but not identical systems: one set of rules for placing products on the Great Britain market, and another stricter and faster-moving set for any product sold into the EU.

What this could mean for UK flooring

For the flooring sector, chemicals regulation is a strategic variable. A few implications stand out:

- **Design to the higher bar:** If a product goes anywhere near the EU, it is safer to assume EU REACH (and its future tightening) is the real benchmark. Building portfolios around chemistries that are already under EU scrutiny could lead to stranded products and costly reformulation.
- **Interrogate the supply chain:** Distributors and installers will need clearer visibility of what is in their products. Understand how upstream suppliers plan to handle EU restrictions and whether their UK formulations will diverge
- **Watch for reputational risk at home:** Even if UK law allows certain substances for longer, customers, especially large contractors, public-sector buyers and retailers may prefer “EU-grade” formulations. Being seen to exploit laxer UK rules could carry brand and procurement risks.
- **Expect more volatility, not less:** With Brussels accelerating and Westminster hesitating, the regulatory landscape will remain fluid. REACH is always evolving, so some chemicals that weren’t covered, are now, or could be covered in the future.

EU REACH expected timeline

1. PFAS Restriction Timeline (EU-wide)

The biggest forthcoming REACH change is the EU’s **universal PFAS restriction**, currently moving through the European Chemicals Agency’s (ECHA – an agency of the EU) scientific and governance process with Scientific evaluation completion – end of 2026. ECHA has confirmed it aims to complete its scientific evaluation of the EU-wide PFAS restriction by the end of 2026. **Earliest potential enforcement estimated 2026/2027 onward**

The PFAS restriction once adopted was initially designed to take effect in 2026 or 2027, depending on final negotiations and transition periods for different sectors.

- **18-month transition period** likely before most bans take effect (from earlier versions of the dossier).
- **Longer derogations** for “essential uses” in industrial applications.

This means practical compliance obligations for the flooring sector would begin phasing in from 2026–2028, depending on the specific PFAS used in adhesives, coatings, backing systems, and finishes.

2. SVHC (Candidate List) biannual updates

REACH continues to add **new SVHC substances every January and June**.

LINKS

[UK Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\)– UK Registration Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals \(REACH\)](#)

[EU REACH – European Chemicals Agency \(ECHA\)](#)

[DEFRA – Policy Paper – PFAS Plan: Building a Safer Future Together](#)