UK SUSTAINABLE FLOORING ALLIANCE

Info Sheet

UK updates PFAS Plan: Challenges and opportunities (Apr 2026)

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UK PFAS Plan

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) — the so-called "forever chemicals" — have rapidly become one of the most significant chemical issues facing UK manufacturing. Resistant to heat, water and oil, PFAS have enabled decades of innovation across textiles, construction materials, coatings and surface treatments. But mounting evidence of their persistence and environmental impact has shifted both public perception and regulatory priorities. The UK Government now describes PFAS as *"one of the most pressing chemical challenges of our time"* in its recently published **PFAS Plan: *Building a Safer Future Together*** (3 February 2026).

For the flooring industry — which relies on PFAS for stain-resistance, durable wear layers, protective coatings, anti-slip treatments and adhesive performance — the implications are significant and steadily increasing.

Growing Public and Regulatory Spotlight

Public understanding of PFAS surged following the BBC Panorama investigation *The Truth About Forever Chemicals* (December 2025), which highlighted how PFAS contaminate water, soil and ecosystems and can accumulate in the human body. This aligns with government concerns: the UK's 2026 PFAS Plan warns that PFAS contamination threatens *"public health, wildlife and the quality of our natural environment"*. Given the widespread use of PFAS in paints, varnishes, coatings, construction materials and technical textiles, the flooring sector is definitely within scope.

UK Government Approach: Phased, Evidence-Driven, Long-Term

The UK's first national PFAS Plan sets out a measured strategy grounded in three pillars:
(1) Understanding sources, **(2) Tackling pathways**, and **(3) Reducing exposure**.
Unlike the EU, the UK Government is *not* pursuing immediate broad PFAS bans. Instead, it is focusing on:

- **Strengthened monitoring across water, soil and industrial emissions**
- **Greater collaboration with industry** to identify PFAS use and viable alternatives
- **Proportionate regulation**, allowing continued PFAS use in sectors lacking substitutes, such as some medical and clean-energy applications.

- **A commitment to reform UK REACH by 2028** to enable more efficient PFAS controls and improve alignment with the EU and other partners

In other words, the UK is tightening PFAS oversight — but gradually. For flooring businesses, this means future restrictions are possible, but will be phased and evidence-based.

PFAS and the EU

In contrast, the EU is advancing one of the most sweeping chemical restrictions in its history. The European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) issued a major update to its PFAS restriction proposal on 20 August 2025, expanding assessed sectors and refining restriction options. Final scientific opinions are expected in late 2026, after which EU-wide legislation could follow.

This proposal covers more than 10,000 PFAS substances and directly affects sectors tied to flooring, including:

- Construction & household materials
- Technical textiles
- Industrial coatings, surfactants and solvents (used in adhesives and finishing treatments)

Regulatory options range from near-total bans to strict controlled-use exemptions. Either route will reshape supply chains. For UK manufacturers importing from or exporting to the EU, this divergence could pose real commercial risks: reformulation pressures, restricted material availability, rising costs and potential loss of market access if products cannot meet EU PFAS rules.

Potential risks for the flooring sector

1. Compliance and Supply Chain Risk

PFAS use in flooring is embedded at multiple points — in polymer chemistry, coatings, dyes, adhesives and stain-repellent finishes. Tracing PFAS through international supply chains is complex and costly, and DEFRA acknowledges that *some sectors currently have no viable alternatives*.

2. Commercial and Procurement Risk

Local authorities, housing providers and developers may increasingly require PFAS-free materials as part of environmental or sustainability policies. Flooring products containing PFAS could face procurement barriers, particularly in social housing and public-sector construction.

3. Cost and Reformulation Pressure

Even before UK restrictions emerge, the ripple effect of EU regulation may force reformulation earlier than expected. PFAS-free alternatives are improving but in many cases remain more expensive or technically constrained.

4. Market Divergence

If the UK maintains a slower regulatory path while the EU accelerates, UK suppliers could face a split market — one PFAS-restricted and one less so — complicating manufacturing, certification and inventory management.

Even without immediate UK bans, foresight and early preparation will reduce future costs and disruption. The following steps could be considered:

A. Map PFAS Use Across Products and Processes

Carry out a structured audit of PFAS across all product ranges, including coatings, adhesives, backings, finishes and imported components.

B. Engage Suppliers on Alternative Chemistries

Initiate discussions about PFAS-free or reduced-PFAS options and identify where alternatives are technically feasible — and where they are not.

C. Strengthen Testing, Certification and Documentation

Begin incorporating PFAS testing into quality assurance protocols. Early documentation will ease compliance under both UK and EU frameworks.

D. Plan for Divergent UK/EU Regulatory Timelines

Evaluate how EU restrictions coming into force in 2026–2027 may affect raw materials, imports, or market access.

E. Build a PFAS Transition Strategy

Prioritise product lines most exposed to PFAS scrutiny, assess reformulation timelines and model cost implications.

F. Communicate Transparently with Customers

As awareness grows, housing providers and large contractors may demand more clarity. Prepare PFAS-related product disclosures and transition commitments.

Looking Ahead

In the near term, the UK's regulatory approach will remain targeted and evidence-based. But the long-term direction is likely to be reduced PFAS use, increased transparency and tighter controls, especially after forthcoming UK REACH reforms. Meanwhile, EU rules will continue to exert pressure on UK supply chains regardless of domestic timelines.

For the flooring industry, PFAS is an emerging compliance and market-access challenge that recommends strategic planning today. Manufacturers, distributors and specifiers who act early will be best placed to navigate the coming changes, maintain competitiveness and assure customers that their products are fit for a PFAS-constrained future.

LINKS

DEFRA – Policy Paper – PFAS Plan: Building a Safer Future Together

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

EU REACH – European Chemicals Agency (ECHA)