DEUTSCHER FEUERWEHR VERBAND

THE PRESIDENT

DEUTSCHER FEUERWEHRVERBAND e.V.
Reinhardtstraße 25 · 10117 Berlin

European Chemicals Agency
Annankatu 18
P.O. Box 400, FI-00121 Helsinki
Finland

Berlin,
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**Proposal at the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) to limit the manufacture, placing on the market, import or use of perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOA), including its salts and precursors**

Dear ladies and gentlemen

The proposal's threshold limits for perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOA) adversely affect fire brigades in their use of fluorochemical foam extinguishing agents to an unreasonable extent. To fight fires involving hazardous substances, the fire brigades depend on of fluorochemical foam extinguishing agents to ensure effective fire fighting. PFOAs are also indispensable in the industry for storing and processing in fixed extinguishing installations to ensure effective fire fighting.

The Aqueous Film Forming Foams (AFFF) available on the market all include a percentage of PFOA that is a 1000 times higher than the proposed threshold. Other foam extinguishing agents with similar characteristics are not likely to become available any time soon. Implementing the proposal with the threshold limits included would make effective hazard prevention impossible, along with the corresponding consequences for the population, occupational safety, the environment and the availability of industrial locations.

**Bundesgeschäftsstelle**
Reinhardtstraße 25
10117 Berlin
*Telefon*
(0 30) 28 88 48 8-00
*Telefax*
(0 30) 28 88 48 8-09
*E-Mail*
info@dfv.org
*Internet*
www.dfv.org

**Präsident**
Hans-Peter Kröger

Extinguishing agents are used in a deliberate and targeted manner, i. e. tailored to the individual situation and carefully assessed as to their effectiveness and as to avoid consequential damages. If it becomes necessary during a fire fighting operation to use extinguishing agents whose side effects include negative consequences for the environment, such a use will always be carefully assessed in advance.

Special extinguishing agents need to be available in industrial areas, especially in chemical and pharmaceutical production but also in the car industry, in the storage of highly flammable products and on transport routes, to ensure an effective and sustainable extinguishing effect.

The current threshold limits for foam extinguishing agents are constantly checked and monitored, particularly in case of fluorochemical products. Storage of these products as well as training of staff handling them takes place whilst ensuring environmental regulations are met.

Many users already had great difficulties to meet the new threshold limit of 10,000 µg/kg after the PFOS ban. Despite extensive cleaning of containers/installations, a release of PFOS into the new foam extinguishing agents could not be avoided.

Limiting the content of PFOA and related substances to 2 ppb (2 µg/kg) is wholly impractical since such a threshold could not be analytically measured and would create unsolvable problems along with the corresponding legal consequences for fire brigades as users of said foam extinguishing agents.

The fluorochemical foam extinguishing agents used today are either stored in mobile installations (fire engines) and/or in stationary systems with storage tanks, pipes, pumps and mixing devices as well as in containers for foaming agents. From the experience we gained from the PFOS restriction procedure we know that it would be impossible to clean these mobile and stationary installations in a way that the proposed threshold limits could be met. At the same time, it can be expected that any newly refilled extinguishing agents will also be contaminated.

We request the agency to ensure planning security for the procurement of these durable extinguishing agents. There are all different kinds of polyfluorinated compounds available on the market. From our perspective, foam extinguishing agents only play a minor role here. Yet exactly in this area, where fluorochemical extinguishing agents are used to keep people safe, a product indispensable for hazard prevention is taken away from the fire brigades in an incomprehensible manner.

Naturally, the DFV aims to avoid any release of fluorine chemicals into the environment. For this purpose we coordinate, for example, with the Federal Environment Agency as can be seen in the common leaflet "Environmentally friendly use of fluorochemical foam extinguishing agents". The information and contents of this leaflet are considered as a kind of requirements specification for all fire brigades.

Therefore, we apply for the following:

1. Rejection of the proposal to limit the content of PFOA and related substances to 2 ppb (2 µg/kg)
2. If, for reasons beyond our comprehension, it should become necessary to introduce such a limitation of PFOA and related substances, we hereby apply to exclude the fire brigades from such a limitation. This exclusion must apply as long as there are no other foam extinguishing agents available that have similar characteristics as today's fluorochemical but PFOS-free extinguishing agents.
3. In any case, we hereby apply to introduce a threshold limit when restricting PFOA and related substances that allows fire brigades to continue using their stored foaming agents until 27 June 2031. Such a threshold should be higher than 10,000 µg/kg. This way, the fire brigades would be given a period of 20 years to continue using the foam extinguishing agents they had to acquire due to the ban of PFOS on 27 June 2011.

Kind regards,

Hans-Peter Kröger