Maine Chapter

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American Academy of Pediatrics
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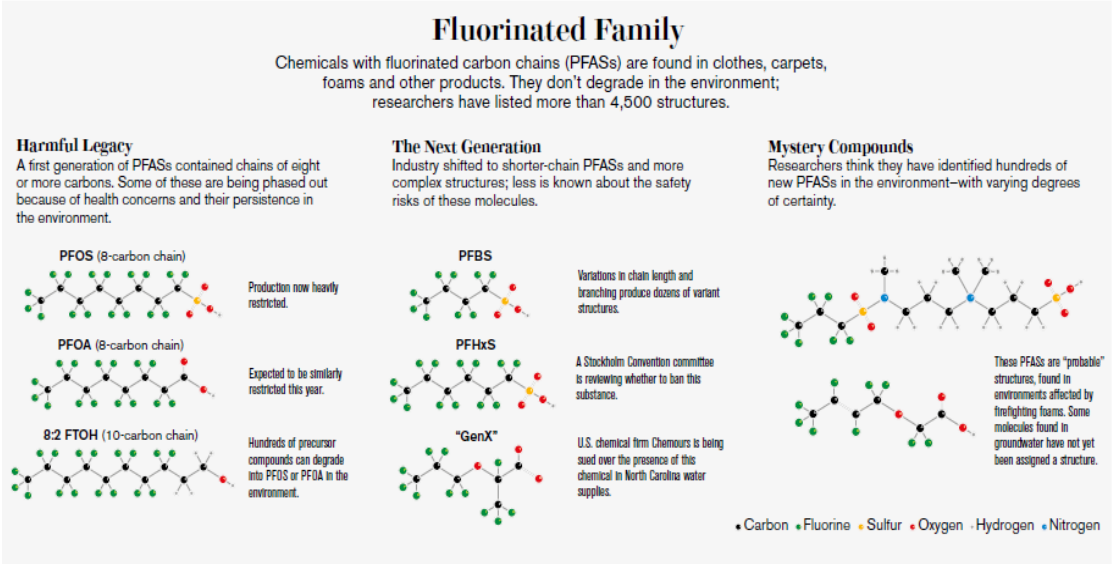
Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and members of the ENR committee, I am a Pediatrician representing my professional organization, the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, in support of LD 1503, which addresses the now well-recognized issue of PFAS contamination by phasing out the use of these "forever chemicals" in consumer products. The initial restrictions will apply to carpets beginning in 2023. There are three components of any debate that might apply to your consideration of this bill.



First – are PFAS harmful? As I'm sure you know, we aren't talking about ONE compound but a class of chemicals that, by nature of the substitution of a fluorine atom for a hydrogen, become remarkably stable in the environment. Some are more harmful than others, but all retain the ability to accumulate in soils and water, and eventually move up the food chain. Some show up in blood tests, but it is unclear if they accurately measure the degree of exposure or potential harm to an individual, since some of the shorter chain compounds are stored quickly in tissues and may not be seen in the blood. ALL of us have measurable amounts in our bodies. Studies in humans suggest that PFAS have immunotoxic, endocrine disrupting, and perhaps carcinogenic effects. The recent PFAS task force report summarizes some of the human and animal data.

Second – what is the contributing role of consumer products in human exposure? As the PFAS task force document outlines, we currently don't require manufacturers to state whether and how much of these substances are in their products. Firefighting foams and industrial uses have been the focus of recent publicity regarding contaminated wells and farmland, but the "forever" nature of PFAS suggest that prevention will require more generalized source removal. Once an old carpet hits the landfill, it is inevitable that PFAS will eventually leach into the water table. As a pediatrician, I also have some concern about the kids who are crawling on the carpet, and ingesting the contaminated dust.

Third – how will restrictions affect the quality of the products in which PFAS are currently incorporated? These substances are great as what they do -- preventing sticking and stains, and waterproofing – when applied to fabrics. There are likely safe alternatives that are not as effective. Remember that we survived the phase-out of lead in paint and gasoline, with some decrement in paint quality and octane, after we realized that the benefits did not justify the costs.

The Maine Chapter of the AAP believes that it's time to apply the same metric to PFAS in consumer products, and that LD 1503 takes a reasonable graded approach towards eliminating the sources of contamination.

Sincerely,

Sydney R. Sewall, MD, MPH – Resident of Hallowell