Should PFAS Be Banned in the United States?

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PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) encompass at least 4,730 distinct artificial substances, according to OECD. They are dubbed 'forever chemicals' because they don't degrade in the environment. However, these substances should be banned due to their persistent nature, widespread contamination, and potential harm to the human body.

PFAS substances are pervasive. As they do not break down in the environment, they are known to contaminate the water supply, including drinking water (CDC, 2022). They can also accumulate in living organisms. This means that PFAS can accumulate in the human body to a level that threatens people's health.

Exposure to PFAS substances has been linked to a higher risk of abnormally high cholesterol, decreased antibody response, kidney cancer, and infant and fetal growth problems. It's also likely to cause liver damage, thyroid disease, and testicular cancer (Ankley et al., 2020). In addition, the impact of PFAS exposure on unborn children is unprecedented: it can lead to reduced response to vaccines, lower birth rate, increased pregnancy loss risk, and obesity.

In the United States alone, over 200 million people live in areas where the PFAS levels in tap water exceed the EPA norms (Sneed, 2021). There are also over 26,000 PFAS-contaminated sites across the country. Companies continue to use PFAS in their products, as well. For example, cosmetics products (lipstick, mascara, eyeliner, etc.) often contain PFAS, readily absorbed through human skin due to their high mobility.

While PFAS as a category of chemicals is wide, it is not impossible to ban all PFAS from a legal standpoint. However, due to PFAS's adverse danger to human health, banning these substances is definitely worth doing.

References

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