

Detailed guide: Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs): registration, disposal, labelling

Updated: The contact email address has been changed to: pcb-enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk.

You must follow this guide if you own polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), or any of the following substances that are also collectively known as PCBs:

- polychlorinated terphenyls
- monomethyl-dibromo-diphenyl methane
- monomethyl-dichloro-diphenyl methane
- monomethyl-tetrachlorodiphenyl methane

You must also follow this guide if you own or operate equipment or material that contains any of these PCBs at a concentration higher than 50 parts per million (0.005%).

Ban on PCBs

PCBs are banned. You must [dispose of PCBs](#), and equipment or material that contains them, as soon as possible unless they're covered by an exception.

Exceptions to the PCB ban

Research or disposal

The ban does not apply to PCBs held:

- for research and analysis into the properties of PCBs
- as part of a process to dispose of PCBs (for example at a hazardous waste disposal site) or a process to remove ('decontaminate') PCBs from equipment

Transformers

You can continue to use transformers if the fluid in the transformer has a PCB concentration below 500 parts per million (0.05%).

You must [dispose of the transformer](#) as soon as possible after the end of its useful life.

Small components of equipment

You can continue to use small pieces of equipment that contain PCBs if both of the following apply:

- they're not [CE](#)
- they're components of larger pieces of equipment, which are not CE either

The exception for smaller equipment is meant to avoid you having to destroy or damage a large piece of equipment to remove the PCBs contained in a small component. The exception does not apply if it's practical for you to remove the smaller component and get rid of the PCBs without damaging the larger machine.

Contaminated equipment (CE)

Any equipment that contains more than 5 litres of fluid containing PCBs (or more than 5 litres of fluid that has a PCB concentration of more than 0.005%) is classed as CE.

You must generally assume the following equipment is CE if it was manufactured before 1987 and contains more than 5 litres of fluid:

- power factor capacitors
- heat transfer equipment
- pole-mounted transformers
- process heating equipment
- vacuum pumps
- high temperature hydraulic systems
- electrical resistors
- brushings and other high voltage equipment
- fluorescent light ballasts
- hospital diagnostic equipment

You do not have to assume such equipment is CE if you're certain it does not contain PCBs, for example if you have:

- carried out tests on the equipment that showed it does not contain PCBs
- kept the original manufacturers' manual and it shows the equipment does not contain PCBs

If you're not sure whether your equipment contains PCBs, you must assume it does.

Combined sets of equipment

Email pcb-enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk if you hold several pieces of equipment that would not be classed as CE on their own, but are part of a combined set which would be classed as CE.

This would apply, for example, if you have a piece of equipment that contains multiple capacitors which individually contain less than 5 litres of fluid, but collectively contain more than 5 litres of fluid.

The Environment Agency will discuss this with you on a case-by-case basis.

Register CE

You must register any CE that you own with the Environment Agency, including CE that:

- has a legal use (for example transformers with a PCB concentration below 0.05%)
- does not have a legal use, but you have not disposed of yet (you must tell the Environment Agency how you plan to dispose of it as soon as possible)

Complete a [PCB holdings registration form](#) and return it to the Environment Agency as soon as possible.

You must re-register your equipment every year until you stop holding CE. To do this send a new PCB holdings registration form to the Environment Agency, listing all CE you hold on 31 July each year.

You must pay a £155 fee every year when you submit your PCB holdings registration form.

If you become the owner of CE (for example if you buy a business that operates such equipment), you must register the equipment even if it's been registered before.

Take CE off the register

You can take CE off the PCB register:

- after you have [disposed of it](#)
- if you sell it, or you sell the business or site it was part of
- if you have carried out tests that prove it does not contain PCBs
- if you have decontaminated it, so that the PCB content of the fluid is less than 0.005%

You can take equipment off the register at any time by completing the 'de-registering equipment' section of the [PCB holdings registration form](#) and returning it to the Environment Agency.

There's no charge for deregistering equipment.

Labelling CE and premises

You must attach a label to any CE stating that the equipment is contaminated with PCBs.

You must also attach a sign to the premises where the equipment is used stating that the premises contains equipment contaminated by PCBs.

You must make sure the labels and signs are clearly visible and cannot be easily removed.

For transformers where the fluid has a PCB content of less than 0.05%, your label and sign can say, 'PCBs contaminated <0.05%'.

Dispose of PCBs

You must dispose of PCBs and materials that contain PCBs as a persistent organic pollutant and hazardous waste.

That means you can either:

- dispose of the PCBs or equipment in a [way that destroys the PCB content](#)
- [apply to permanently store the equipment](#) underground if you cannot destroy the PCB content

Email pcb-enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk to discuss how to do this.

You must keep records to show that you disposed of the PCBs by one of these 2 methods.