

Restrictions under new chemical regime announced for first time

The Government has today (23 March) set out the first restrictions to be initiated under its new chemical regulation system, UK REACH, to tackle risks posed by chemicals.

The launch of the UK REACH programme includes plans to initiate the restriction process on lead ammunition which is used widely in the shooting industry and causes harm to the environment, wildlife and people.

Certain harmful substances that can be found in tattoo inks and permanent make-up could also be restricted. The ink in tattoos can sometimes contain substances that can cause health effects, most commonly skin reactions, such as irritation or sensitisation. The substances this restriction proposal will consider includes, but is not limited to, substances that can cause cancer, are dangerous to reproduction, skin sensitisers and irritants.

A restriction will be introduced if evidence shows an unacceptable risk to human health and the environment, and after a public consultation. The review of the evidence will be conducted by the Health & Safety Executive (HSE), with support from the Environment Agency (EA). They will investigate the risk of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and consider how best to manage any identified risks.

PFAS are a group of over 9,000 different chemicals, some of which are already banned or highly restricted. In industry, these substances are used as stain repellents, coatings and fire-fighting foams. The chemicals in PFAS are extremely persistent in the environment; the substances can accumulate in animals and can also be toxic this means PFAS are of growing concern for both human health and environmental reasons.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

The plans announced today are just the first step in a wider programme of work we are able to pursue under the new independent chemicals framework UK REACH.

We will continue to review what further measures we can explore to safeguard human health and the environment based on robust science and the best available evidence.

Based on the commitment to having control of our own laws, the UK established its own independent chemicals regulatory framework from 1 January 2021. UK REACH allows Great Britain to make decisions on the regulation of chemicals that are based on the best available scientific evidence, ensuring that chemicals remain safely used and managed.