2026

The UK Government's new PFAS Plan: what it means for industry

Whitepaper

Puragen

Activated Carbon Evolution

The UK Government has published its long-awaited PFAS Plan, marking the first formal step towards addressing PFAS contamination across the environment. While the Plan has been broadly welcomed as overdue recognition of the issue, it has also attracted criticism for lacking clear timelines, enforceable standards, and practical delivery mechanisms.

Compared to the EU's more coordinated regulatory approach, the UK remains behind the curve, with meaningful restrictions likely still several years away, particularly as countries such as Denmark and France have already begun phasing out certain industrial PFAS uses ahead of the EU's anticipated 2026/27 restriction.

While the Plan stops short of immediate enforcement, it signals a clear direction of travel: PFAS monitoring will expand significantly over the coming years, regulatory scrutiny is expected to intensify, and accountability for PFAS producers and users will increase as evidence improves and exposure pathways are more clearly understood.

A "plan for a plan"

The government describes the Plan as an initial set of proposals to support a longer-term strategy. In practice, this means evidence-building, consultation, and longer-term reform, rather than immediate regulation. For industry, this creates uncertainty in the short term, but indicates a clear tightening of expectations around monitoring, emissions control, waste handling, and remediation.

Understanding PFAS sources: monitoring and accountability

Scale of Contamination

The Plan highlights the scale of contamination, citing PFAS presence in around 80% of surface waters and 50% of groundwater samples tested. It also acknowledges major limitations in analytical capacity and the high cost of testing.

The Environment Agency

Key actions include rolling out the Environment Agency's PFAS Prioritisation Map to public sector bodies by the end of 2026, alongside expanded monitoring programmes for soils, estuarine and coastal environments through to 2028.

Monitoring & Mapping

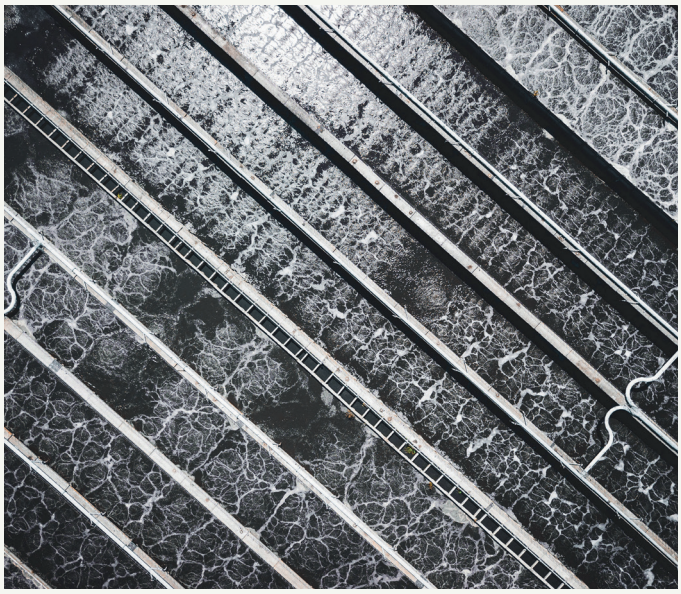
While these actions introduce few direct obligations today, enhanced monitoring and mapping will inevitably increase regulatory exposure and potential liability for PFAS producers and users as contamination sources become easier to identify.

PFAS Regulations: caution but growing scrutiny

The Plan recognises that PFAS interventions must address the full lifecycle of these chemicals, but many commitments remain exploratory. Unlike the EU's class-based approach under REACH, the UK will regulate PFAS on a substance-by-substance or use-specific basis. The government has committed to reforms to better align UK REACH with trading partners by December 2028, but near-term actions are limited.

There are notable signals of tightening controls, including potential restrictions on PFAS in firefighting foams, adding more PFAS to the UK REACH Candidate List, and implementing new obligations driven by the UN Stockholm Convention for additional PFAS now classified as Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs).

The Plan also highlights landfill as a major pathway for PFAS release and acknowledges that most sites are not equipped to manage PFAS-containing leachate or landfill gas. While it stops short of banning landfilling PFAS waste, it points to growing focus on destruction technologies and the limitations of existing disposal routes such as incineration.



Reducing exposure: water, food, sludge and legacy contamination

The Plan places increasing emphasis on PFAS exposure routes, including drinking water, food systems, sewage sludge, and contaminated land. PFOS is currently the only PFAS with a statutory Environmental Quality Standard (EQS), but the government is working toward additional toxicological thresholds and improved analytical methods; steps that could enable future EQS expansion.

Sewage Sludge

Sewage sludge applied to agricultural land is identified as a significant long-term risk pathway, with increasing scrutiny expected and potential consultation on bringing sludge use under the Environmental Permitting Regime.

Legacy Contamination

Legacy contamination is also a central theme. The Environment Agency's National Risk Screening Project is expected to identify over 10,000 potentially contaminated sites in England, strengthening the likelihood of future remediation demands driven by redevelopment, permitting, water quality compliance, or third-party claims.

What industry should take from the Plan

Although the UK PFAS Plan is cautious in enforcement, it reinforces an accelerating shift toward tighter controls, greater monitoring, and growing accountability. As contamination is mapped more comprehensively and regulations evolve, PFAS risk will become increasingly visible and harder to ignore.

For industry, the most resilient strategy is early action: invest in testing, source control, capture technologies and long term strategic solutions. Organisations that act now will be better positioned to manage regulatory risk, maintain compliance readiness, and protect operational resilience as the UK PFAS framework develops.

Puragen's Solution

Puragen provides a complete, end-to-end approach to PFAS management, helping operators move from uncertainty to assurance.

Search

Puragen has invested in advanced analytical capability, including LC-MS, enabling rapid and accurate identification of PFAS species and concentrations to support early risk assessment and treatment selection.

Capture

Puragen's engineered activated carbon solutions are optimised for PFAS adsorption in both gas and liquid applications, including short-chain PFAS that are typically harder to remove. These solutions can be deployed through mobile filtration systems for rapid, flexible deployment.

Puragen has proven experience supporting drinking water, legacy contamination projects and industrial operators with PFAS removal, using robust activated carbon-based systems engineered for demanding operating conditions.

Destroy

Puragen's REACT-Sys+ reactivation technology enables the recycling of POPs-containing spent carbon, including PFAS laden carbon, delivering complete PFAS molecular breakdown. This allows spent carbon to be safely re-used, eliminating the need for landfill or incineration and significantly reducing lifecycle carbon footprint.

Across a range of applications, Puragen delivers the technologies and technical expertise required to manage PFAS risk effectively—from Search, to Capture, to Destroy.

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Get in touch @ +44 1942 842 240 puragen.com