

December 2009

European Community Environment Ministry Ban on Fire Fighting Foams Containing PFOS

If you are not already aware, you will soon be confronted with EU requirements concerning fire fighting foam concentrates containing perfluorooctane sulfonates (PFOS). In this newsletter TYCO Fire Suppression & Building Products will update you on the issues and the procedures we have put in place to provide you with assistance to meet your obligations.

The European Community has passed laws stating that all materials containing PFOS (perfluorooctane sulfonates) will be banned (Directive 2006/122/EC). The EU Environment Ministry has determined that foam concentrates containing PFOS shall not be used or stored after June 27th 2011.

What is PFOS?

PFOS is an impurity found in high concentrations in the Electro Chemical Fluorination (ECF) process that produces fluorosurfactant compounds. It is an extremely toxic substance that is bio-accumulative, meaning it has harmful effects to the environment, and is potentially harmful to aquatic, animal and human life. This substance is persistent and research data suggests it is not biodegradable.

Note: whilst PFOS is a major issue in fire fighting foam production, be assured that all Tyco FS&BP foams are now made with fluorosurfactants obtained by a different process called Telomer, which does not create PFOS.

Where are we likely to find PFOS foams?

1. 3M™ foams: PFOS can be found in levels exceeding the EU limiting values in all old 3M™ Light Water™ foam agents - AFFF or AFFF-ATC.
2. Mixture case: In early 2000 3M left the foams market. Many remaining foam manufacturers filled the supply gap left by 3M and provided a refilling service to 3M customers. However the mixing of 3M PFOS foams with any other foams, even those not containing PFOS, will very likely lead to a mixture which exceeds the permitted EU tolerance (<50 ppm PFOS by mass) which will require remedial action.
3. Tyco FS&BP foams: Fire fighting foams manufactured by Tyco FS&BP since 2000 are safe and do not contain PFOS. However foams manufactured before 2000 may present a risk and should be considered as requiring proof of 'safe for use'. If you are unsure of your Tyco FS&BP foam stocks, please contact us.
4. Other foam suppliers: A few foam manufacturers have been using surfactant containing PFOS up until 2004.

What to do?

If you have a system which may fall into any of the categories above, the concentrate must be tested and may have to be removed and replaced before 27th June 2011.

What can you do?

1. Identify your foam concentrate.
2. Tyco FS&BP has expert lab analysis facilities: you can send us a representative sample (200 ml required) from your tank for testing. A report will be issued from an official external laboratory. Contact Tyco FS&BP for a sample kit and for more technical support.
3. If PFOS is detected, TYCO FS&BP can provide technical assistance for foams replacement and we can provide advice on how to check if other parts of your system distribution have been exposed to PFOS.**
4. The foam concentrate found containing PFOS and all other contaminated components (e.g. bladders from tanks) will be disposed of in a responsible manner.

**cleaning of tanks or equipment might not be sufficient to avoid further contamination. Porous material can potentially re-contaminate fresh foam not containing PFOS.

Please contact your local Tyco FS&BP sales representative or Email us on PFOS@tyco-bspd.com for further information.