



**Conference ‘Tackling PFAS
Pollution’ & Launch ‘Knowledge
Center Innovative Remediation
Solutions’
- OUTCOMES**

Vestar, Antwerp, Belgium

In the framework of the Belgium Presidency of the Council of the EU, the Regional Authorities of Flanders hosted an event focused on addressing PFAS pollution. This event served two primary purposes:

- the Flemish government and (inter)national experts shared insights gained and actions taken concerning PFAS pollution;
- secondly, it marked the official launch of the Knowledge Center on Innovative Remediation Solutions (KIS), which seeks to bring together various stakeholders (authorities, knowledge institutions and industry) working on technologies for remediating PFAS pollution from the environment.

These two topics were outlined in two plenary sessions, which were followed by a range of workshops.

The workshops encompassed presentations covering prevention and containment measures for PFAS emissions, (bio)monitoring and reduction of PFAS exposure, soil remediation and waste management strategies, and effective risk communication and data governance. Furthermore, the Flemish authorities presented enforcement initiatives and outlined various tools and measures for analyzing PFAS across different environmental compartments, involving newly developed techniques for measuring PFAS in air. This also included unveiling newly developed soil limit values and presenting enforcement activities related to PFOA in firefighting foams within the framework of the POP regulation. Additionally, two new studies on Best Available Techniques (BAT) for PFAS abatement technologies were presented during the event. Moreover, workshops focused on substitution strategies for PFAS, initiatives to address PFAS presence in recycled materials, and the potential application of the Polluter Pays Principle.

The workshops featured speakers from Flemish, national and international authorities (e.g European Commission, European Environment Agency, OECD, US-EPA), industry, non-governmental organizations, and research institutes.

On the event's second day, excursions were organized to a waste management facility, an incubator for innovative technologies including PFAS destruction methods, and several remediation sites and technical installations for PFAS cleanup and monitoring.

KEY MESSAGES OF THE CONFERENCE

The organisers of the PFAS event noted the following key messages from the different plenaries and workshops. This is not the formal Belgian position.

- The use of PFAS should be phased out with no further delay. The switch to alternatives is often costly. Therefore a regulatory push for PFAS substitution or prevention is crucial. There is a need to get the same message on phasing out and substitution of PFAS also accepted on a global level as the biggest market on the use of PFAS is outside of the EU.
- To minimize emissions of PFAS and to avoid regrettable substitution, it is essential to obtain, valorize and share data and knowledge in order to optimize regulation, environmental permitting, enforcing, monitoring and remediation.
- To ensure effective and efficient legislation to protect human health and the environment within the EU environmental regulation framework, the exchange of information on policies and actions by the Commission and the Member states is crucial. Additionally, it is essential that all relevant

stakeholders work together. New European provisions, including standards, will ensure a level playing field. They should aim to avoid as much as possible new pollution, but also to deal with legacy PFAS problems through an integrated approach.

- Tackling of the PFAS pollution needs to be done by measures that cover the complete material cycle, and this in a systemic and multidisciplinary way: preventing production and use of PFAS, limiting emissions to the environment, minimising the spread of the pollution and the exposure of the human population, fauna and flora, remediation of contaminated sites, the treatment of PFAS-holding materials, and the destruction of its PFAS residues.
- Material chains should be as free as possible from substances of concern. This requires, on the one hand, substitution of unsafe substances in new products and on the other hand attention to legacy substances in waste streams that are brought back into the loop via recycling and reuse. Innovation is needed to rid waste streams of the unsafe contaminants. If this is not possible, a safe sink must be available for the relevant waste for final treatment.
- Enforcement officers need legislative and scientific tools (i.e. up to date emission limit values and state of the art analytical methods) that enable them to quickly act on the basis of the most up to date knowledge and developments on PFAS pollution.
- Additional activities to enable a good application of the Polluter Pays Principle are needed to financially tackle PFAS pollution and compensate for negative (health) impact of PFAS. In order to guarantee a level playing field, it is suggested that these initiatives should be taken at EU level. Extended Producer Responsibility and possible other instruments should be looked into in order to divide the costs among all the actors in the material cycle chain.
- Remediation techniques have been developed and promising new techniques are being further explored and scaled to market ready solutions. We need to continue investing in the further development of those; the KIS program launched by Flanders can be exemplary.
- The PFAS crisis created a momentum for initiatives towards innovation, and for collaboration. It is crucial to have sufficient funds and platforms to enhance cooperation to support development and demonstration projects.