



# Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பினாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

Websites:  
(in English, BM, Chinese,  
& Tamil)  
[www.consumer.org.my](http://www.consumer.org.my)

10 Jalan Masjid Negeri, 11600 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia  
Tel: 604-8299511 Fax: 604-8298109  
email: [consumerofpenang@gmail.com](mailto:consumerofpenang@gmail.com)

Press Release

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## Groups Seek Legally Binding Action to Stop the Global Contamination Crisis Caused by “Forever Chemicals”

Public interest organizations are seeking a legally binding response to the global contamination crisis and the resulting infringement on the UN-recognized human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment caused by the highly persistent and toxic “forever chemicals.”

At a webinar held today, environmental health advocates drew attention to the unfolding contamination of the natural environment with per and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), which have earned the nickname “forever chemicals” because they do not break down or degrade easily in the environment and remain intact for very long periods of time.

Co-organized by the EcoWaste Coalition, Consumers’ Association of Penang (CAP), Interfacing Development Interventions for Sustainability (IDIS), Mother Earth Foundation, Taiwan Watch Institute (TWI) and the International Pollutants Elimination Network-Southeast and East Asia (IPEN-SEA), the webinar pointed to the need to ban PFAS as a class and stop their manufacture and use, which is dramatically undermining the people’s right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

PFAS, which are known for their grease- and water-resistant properties, are used in making non-stick cookware, grease-proof food packaging, water-repellent clothing, stain-proof carpets and upholstery, fire-fighting foams, polishes and waxes, paints, coatings and sealants, personal care and cosmetic products, etc.

Because of their widespread use, PFAS have been detected in most places on the planet, and have been found in rainwater, groundwater and other drinking water at unsafe levels in many locations. A report released last year revealed the presence of PFAS in the umbilical cord blood samples from 30,000 newborn babies in 40 studies conducted.

“We are witnessing, for the first time in history, a breach of the planetary boundaries, the safe operating space if you will of a man-made chemical,” said Lee Bell, IPEN Mercury and POPs Policy Advisory, the webinar’s lead resource person. “Scientists in a recent study concluded that for just four PFAS compounds of the 12,000 in existence, the global spread of these chemicals in the atmosphere has led to the planetary boundary for chemical pollution being exceeded.”

In addition, the situation may not be able to be reversed, Lee Bell warned, because of the high persistence of PFAS and their ability to continuously cycle in the hydrosphere. “The ease with which PFAS move through water means they are difficult to contain, spreading through waterways, the food chain, wildlife, livestock and fisheries. Ultimately, they accumulate at the top of the food chain – in humans,” he said.

Lee Bell slammed the debate over the health impacts of PFAS as simply delaying tactics. “It has been proven that C8 PFAS compound exposure can lead to thyroid disease, liver damage, kidney cancer, testicular cancer, reproductive issues, lower birth weight, reduced response to vaccines and the list goes on,” he said. “Industry would like us to spend decades evaluating the impacts of each PFAS compound individually and fighting over bans and exemptions one by one. With over 12,000 PFAS compounds to assess, the entire planet will be heavily contaminated before we have assessed a fraction of the total known PFAS compounds.”

The webinar pointed to five action points that are required to stop the global PFAS contamination and avert a global human rights disaster:

1. Urgently ban the production and use of the entire PFAS class globally.
2. Hold manufacturers accountable for the global PFAS contamination and make them pay for the global PFAS clean-up.
3. Stop burning PFAS waste in cement kilns and incinerators which spreads the problem.
4. Stop dumping PFAS wastes on land.
5. Invest and roll out closed-loop, non-combustion destruction technologies for PFAS waste.

“The greed and duplicity of PFAS manufacturers in hiding the health effects of these chemicals and the woefully inadequate government directives is a stark reminder that business interests continue to override exposure reduction measures in chemical regulation,” said Lee Bell. “What we need is to turn off the PFAS tap.”

To safeguard the health of workers, women, and children, CAP together with other public interest groups propose that countries address PFAS chemicals as a class and ban them altogether. This will reduce the prospect of replacing one toxic type of PFAS with another.

**Mohideen Abdul Kader**  
**President**  
**Consumers’ Association of Penang**