

Position paper



Renewi: a view on PFAS

Introduction

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a class of fluorinated organic chemicals that have become a global problem due to their widespread use, persistence, and potential impacts on human health and the environment. Addressing PFAS requires coordinated action from industry, regulators, researchers, and society at large. At Renewi, we are committed to addressing the challenges posed by PFAS and taking proactive steps to minimize their impact.

Our Approach

1. Compliance and Risk Assessment

PFAS will remain present in waste streams for many years to come. Their persistence and complexity pose significant challenges for waste management, particularly as the EU moves towards stricter regulatory controls. Renewi is committed to full compliance with evolving legislation and to minimising PFAS levels in recycled materials. We conduct thorough risk assessments and routinely analyse recycled materials to identify and address any potential limit exceedances. Our aim is to provide transparent and responsible waste management solutions.

On sites, we invest in the best available techniques to ensure we comply with local, national, and international regulations. Beyond our active operations, we monitor legacy sites to assess potential PFAS migration in leachate or soil. We consider this monitoring, as well as the careful management of PFAS throughout its life cycle, as essential elements of responsible waste management.

2. PFAS Removal

We are actively researching and testing technologies to effectively remove PFAS from waste streams. While the upcoming REACH restriction will help reduce PFAS use, existing PFAS-containing materials will continue to present a risk to human and environmental health.

As a waste management company, we are committed to implementing the best available technologies to minimize these industrial PFAS emissions and protect the environment. Our focus is on wastewater treatment, soil treatment, and waste management. We work closely with industry experts and regulatory bodies to ensure that our methods comply with the latest scientific research and regulatory requirements. Our goal is to implement technologies that can remove both short- and long-chain PFAS to acceptable levels.

3. Collaboration and Research

Innovation is central to our PFAS strategy. Renewi collaborates with industry partners, research institutions and regulatory bodies to advance research, knowledge sharing and technology development to enhance our capabilities in PFAS removal and destruction. Currently, Renewi is involved in multiple pilot projects with third parties, exploring fit-for-purpose solutions and emerging technologies. Our goal is to be as exhaustive as possible in identifying and implementing the most effective techniques. To this end, we maintain open communication and active knowledge transfer across our network of collaborators.

One such initiative is the WETSUS research programme, which focuses on developing advanced techniques for the removal and destruction of all types of PFAS, including short-chain PFAS like TFA from water.

Opportunities

Renewi believes PFAS represents one of the defining environmental challenges of our time. We recognise the need for a halt in PFAS production and support efforts to regulate and restrict the use of PFAS. Simultaneously, we advocate for and contribute to increased investment in research and development of next-generation PFAS removal technologies.

Renewi occupies a unique position in the chain, focusing on end-of-life management of PFAS-containing waste. We handle materials and waste streams where PFAS ultimately accumulate, placing us at the frontline of identifying, isolating, and treating these substances.

This position gives us both a responsibility and an opportunity to lead. We are not only focused on compliance, but on shaping the future of PFAS management by driving technological innovation and managing our customers' waste as responsibly as possible. We commit to this responsibility through our daily operations, research, and collaboration with other bearers of knowledge.

By embracing these opportunities, we can contribute to a more sustainable and PFAS-'free' future.

Conclusion

PFAS contamination is a pressing global issue that demands urgent action to halt production and invest in advanced removal technologies.

Renewi is dedicated to addressing the challenges of PFAS by actively researching, testing, and implementing technologies for PFAS removal. Given the vast range of PFAS compounds, some are easier to remove than others. Current technology falls short in addressing the full spectrum of PFAS. Therefore, we are committed to investing in next-generation technologies as a partner and knowledge bearer in this field.

Through collaboration and research, we strive to develop and implement innovative solutions for PFAS removal. We believe that managing PFAS responsibly is not just a regulatory obligation, but a shared societal mission. Together, we can work towards a future where PFAS no longer pose a threat to human health and the environment.