

Why GAO Did This Study

PFAS are a large group of chemicals that are widely used in consumer products because of their heat and stain resistant properties. PFAS may cause adverse health effects at certain levels. Congress has identified 11 categories of items for potential procurement restrictions. Starting April 2023, DOD was prohibited from procuring items in four categories if they contain certain PFAS.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022 includes a provision for GAO to review DOD's procurement of items containing PFAS. This report evaluates (1) information available to DOD regarding PFAS in items and the extent to which the April 2023 prohibition aligns with this information; and (2) the extent to which DOD has developed an approach to implement the April 2023 prohibition on items containing PFAS.

GAO reviewed PFAS detection methods, labeling standards, and statutes; assessed DOD procurement practices and guidelines; and interviewed officials from DOD, other federal agencies, labeling organizations, industry associations, and environmental advocacy groups.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making a matter for congressional consideration to align the item categories specified in the April 2023 prohibition with EPA information. GAO is also making two recommendations to DOD to develop an approach for applying the April 2023 prohibition to the military exchanges and to update its sustainable procurement guidance. DOD concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-23-105982](#). For more information, contact Elizabeth Field at (202) 512-2775 or FieldE1@gao.gov.

PERSISTENT CHEMICALS

Actions Needed to Improve DOD's Ability to Prevent the Procurement of Items Containing PFAS

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) faces challenges implementing statutory prohibitions on procurement of items containing per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). Specifically, there is limited information on PFAS in items because there is no federal law requiring items to be labeled as containing PFAS and there are no Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-validated methods to detect PFAS in products. EPA has created a list of recommended third-party standards and ecolabels that addresses the presence of PFAS in some items. GAO's analysis of 11 item categories found that EPA information on PFAS exists for four. Two of these four categories relate to the statutory prohibition for DOD that goes into effect April 2023. For the seven other item categories, there are no EPA-recommended third-party standards or ecolabels.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Information on the Presence of Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) in Item Categories

PFAS prohibition	Item category	Information on presence of PFAS
Beginning April 2023	Non-stick cookware	No
Beginning April 2023	Non-stick cooking utensils	No
Beginning April 2023	Upholstered furniture	Yes
Beginning April 2023	Carpets and Rugs	Yes
	Furniture waxes	No
	Car window treatments	No
	Shoes	No
	Clothing	No
	Cleaning products	Yes
	Floor waxes	Yes
	Car wax	No

Source: GAO analysis of EPA information. | GAO-23-105982

In addition, the April 2023 prohibition does not allow two PFAS to be present at any level. However, EPA officials noted that several of the third-party standards or ecolabels allow for PFAS to be present at low levels, for example, by exposure to environmental sources of PFAS during the manufacturing process. As a result, DOD does not have all the information needed to fully implement prohibitions.

DOD has taken some steps to implement the April 2023 prohibition, including updating procurement policy for contracting officers and guidance for procurement of goods by government purchase cards. However, DOD has not assessed how to prevent military exchanges from procuring and reselling certain goods that could contain PFAS. Further, DOD has not updated its sustainable procurement guidance to reflect statutory prohibitions. As a result, DOD is at risk of continuing to procure items that contain certain statutorily prohibited PFAS.