

COATING WORLD®

Coating News Flash

Whitford's response to the recent EPA news release on PFOA

1. What's all the recent noise on PFOA in the media?

An announcement on 25 January 2006 by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on progress made by industry on the reduction of PFOA — and, believe it or not, it is all good news. The EPA news release makes this clear.

2. But haven't I heard just the opposite from the media?

No. What some media have said has been misconstrued. For example, ABC News used these headlines: "Government moves to curb use of chemical in Teflon" and "EPA calls on companies to eliminate use of dangerous chemical found in Teflon". Note: "Teflon" is a registered trademark of DuPont, but has been used by the press as a generic name for "nonstick coatings".

These headlines refer to a chemical used in the production of Teflon®, not Teflon itself. Nevertheless, some people have misunderstood this to mean "elimination of Teflon" and this has led to irresponsible rumors that are 180 degrees away from the truth.

3. What's the fuss all about then?

Any "fuss" is due to this misunderstanding of the facts. The gist of the news is that the EPA has asked the eight companies that use PFOA to manufacture fluoropolymers in the USA to join in a planned program to reduce the emissions of PFOA by 95% by 2010 as compared to 2000, and to achieve the virtual elimination of it by 2015.

4. Is it possible to achieve a 95% reduction?

Yes. In fact, DuPont has been hard at work at this for some time — and had already achieved a 94% reduction by 2005, and continues working to reduce the use of PFOA even more. Others are doing the same.

5. How are these reductions being achieved?

The sources of the PFOA emitted into the environment are not clearly understood, although it is increasingly apparent that other fluorinated chemicals may play a significant role. The objective of EPA's work is to identify all sources, then reduce or eliminate them.

Through improved manufacturing processes and controls, fluoropolymer manufacturers are substantially reducing emissions of PFOA. At the same time processes have been developed that reduce the amount of PFOA that the fluoropolymer manufacturers ship to coating companies such as Whitford.

Given the two-pronged attack on the problem, the EPA's goal of virtually eliminating the release of PFOA into the environment should be achieved long before the scheduled 2015 deadline.

6. What has Whitford been doing about this problem?

All nonstick coating manufacturers use fluoropolymer (nonstick) dispersions that contain PFOA — without exception.

Whitford has been evaluating these new, low-PFOA alternatives for some time. Most (but

not yet all) of Whitford coatings use these lower-PFOA materials to the point at which Whitford has reduced its use of PFOA considerably. We have been selling these new coatings for over a year with no problems for our customers.

7. Are there any signs of change due to the reductions?

Yes. In 2000, because of the PFOA issue, 3M stopped making ScotchGard®. A professor at the University of Toronto has been measuring the levels of these chemicals found in arctic wildlife for years, and he has just reported that the levels found in arctic seals have been dropping ever since.

8. Is there any chance Teflon or nonsticks will be banned?

Absolutely not. Teflon and other nonstick products are here to stay (they are not PFOA). For many years, they have made significant contributions to human well-being in thousands of industries such as telecommunications, automotive and semi-conductors (not to mention cookware, bakeware and small appliances), and life would be far less easy, less comfortable, and less worry-free without them.

What is changing are the methods used to manufacture such products — which has already reduced the emissions of PFOA significantly, and will virtually eliminate emissions in the near future.

9. Does any of this hoopla have to do with whether it is still safe to use cookware with nonstick coatings?

No. It has been, is, and will always be absolutely safe to use nonstick cookware, bakeware and small appliances. What little PFOA may have been in the nonstick ingredient used to make the coating is removed by the

curing (baking) process through which all nonsticks pass to the point at which it is undetectable in migration tests.

The safety of nonstick coatings was just reaffirmed by many responsible sources, including the United States Food & Drug Administration (FDA), the EPA, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), the People's Republic of China and the government-approved Danish Technological Institute.

10. Who's been leading the charge to study things like PFOA?

The EPA has been the principal agency, although some environmental activists have been making noise. In fact, the Environmental Working Group, one of the harshest critics of DuPont and Teflon, just released a statement in which its president, Ken Cooke, said: "We've been very harsh in singling out DuPont for criticism for its handling of PFOA, but today we also want to single out the company and commend them because they're exhibiting some real leadership here as we go forward".

11. What can we expect in the future?

The virtual elimination of emissions of PFOA with little or no harm done to the industries that manufacture and use fluoropolymers, and no inconvenience to the millions and millions of consumers around the world who depend on and benefit from products that contain Teflon (and similar fluoropolymers).

12. Where can I go for more information?

There is a lot of good and highly detailed information available. If you go to the Whitford website (whitfordww.com), click on "Latest news" and then, in the sub-menu, click on "PFOA info". This will take you to the key links to other sites that cover the PFOA issue.

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