

The global battle against 'forever' chemicals'

June 23 2023



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Chemicals giants have agreed to pay billions of dollars to end lawsuits over contamination from toxic "forever" chemicals found in everyday products such as non-stick frying pans and waterproof clothing.

Polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), chemicals that take a very long time

to break down in nature, have been linked to cancer, infertility and environmental damage, among other complaints.

On Thursday, US industrial conglomerate 3M said it would pay up to \$12.5 billion to settle numerous claims from US public [water](#) systems accusing it of tainting their supplies with the pollutants.

Here is a look at the biggest PFAS settlements to date:

Record US water deal

3M says it will pay between \$10.5 and \$12.5 billion over 13 years to [public water systems](#) across the United States to test and treat water for PFAS.

The deal, which has to be approved by a judge, is the largest involving drinking water in US history.

It centres on 3M's use of firefighting foams containing PFAS, which are accused of polluting groundwater.

3M, which also produces post-it notes and COVID face masks, said in December that it would stop manufacturing PFAS substances by the end of 2025.

Dutch, Belgian cases

In July 2022, 3M agreed to a settlement of 571 million euros (\$612 million) with the Belgian region of Flanders over alleged PFAS pollution from its Zwijndrecht plant, near the city of Antwerp.

Flemish authorities released a study showing that people living near the

plant had high levels of a type of PFAS in their blood.

In May this year, the government of the neighbouring Netherlands said it would seek compensation from 3M for pollution caused by the same plant in the Western Scheldt river.

Dutch authorities last year warned against eating fish, shrimp, mussels and other products from the river.

Dupont case

Just days before the mega-settlement reached by 3M in the United States, US chemicals giant DuPont and its spinoffs Chemours and Corteva announced in early June they would pay nearly \$1.2 billion to settle claims they contaminated water sources serving "the vast majority of the United States population" with PFAS.

The 2019 film "Dark Waters" starring Mark Ruffalo, about a [class action suit](#) brought by people in west Virginia against DuPont, maker of nylon and teflon, over pollutants in their drinking water, helped raise awareness around PFAS pollution.

DuPont lost the case after a 19-year legal battle.

Australian military under fire

Firefighting chemicals were at the heart of a class action suit taken against the Australian government, which it settled in May.

Around 30,000 people claimed that the military's use of firefighting foam containing PFAS had contaminated land around army bases and decreased property values.

They sought Aus\$132.7 million (US\$88 million) in compensation.

The legal settlement was confidential.

© 2023 AFP

Citation: The global battle against 'forever' chemicals' (2023, June 23) retrieved 12 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-06-global-chemicals.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.