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Position Paper

SGI Position Paper on Total Ban on PFAS

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PFAS and the EFSA opinion

In September 2020, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) set a new safety threshold for the main per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, that accumulate in the body. The EFSA has calculated the tolerable weekly intake of PFAS that humans can safely ingest throughout their life. Ingestion takes place through food, packaging materials, air and drinking water. The new thresholds are set significantly lower than that in previous studies.

The translation of this new health-based guidance value into quality standards for surface water, fish, drinking water and sludge, as proposed by the Joint Research Center (JRC) and provides a situation where this persistent group of substances or the so-called "**Forever Chemicals**" pose a significant risk for the quality of the sources for drinking water. Meeting these guidance values will be a herculean task in some countries, as **PFAS is extremely difficult and costly to remove with conventional water treatment facilities.**

PFAS do not belong in the environment – A call for a complete ban

As a cross-sectoral European association representing public services and services of general interest (SGIs) also covering the public water and wastewater sector, **SGI Europe would like to express its concerns about the occurrence of PFAS in the environment**, including the sources of drinking water. The EFSA opinion leads to the conclusion that the emissions of PFAS to the environment must be greatly reduced. The source-control approach is the only correct way to prevent a persistent group of substances, such as PFAS, from ending up in the environment and drinking water sources. This source control approach matches the European precautionary principle and has **proven effective.**

SGI Europe, therefore, advocates for a total ban on PFAS. The restriction proposal submitted by Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands under REACH is a good step in the right direction. Still, it only advocates a ban for 'non-essential uses', which provides too much room for endless discussions on essential and non-essential. In anticipation of a total European ban, all existing discharge permits must be urgently examined for the presence of PFAS and revised where necessary.