

Most people mistakenly believe that the products they buy must be safe. many people say to me, when I'm talking about the chemicals in products that we buy, if it was really bad for you the government wouldn't allow it. Many people believe that the government, having the public's best interest at heart, will stop anything that is harmful from being produced and sold. I don't think that was ever the case, but certainly now industry has much more access to government than ordinary people. The government seems to be much more interested in seeking industry approval and allowing industry to self regulate. Industry has the government's ear, lobbyists can operate without much scrutiny, politicians don't allow real time access to their diaries and people with enough money can buy a seat next to a minister at a party fundraiser. The ordinary person at the supermarket, hardware store or online trying to decipher the labels to see if the chemicals contained in the product will do them or their family long term damage don't have much support because they don't have the government's ear.

These PFAS chemicals have already become ubiquitous in Australia. They have been found in our water, in our food, in our blood. It might be in your raincoat, your toilet paper, carpet, lounge chair, dental floss, tea, deodorant, bra, frypan, even your takeaway container, just to name a few.

The impacts for taxpayers who generally get the bill when the government decides industry should self regulate will be enormous cost. The cost of the environmental rehab, the cost to our health services and the cost to our own health, the costs of testing, the costs of enforcement, the cost of trying avoid these chemicals. The people who make the money from the chemicals will probably never pay a cent towards the process of getting rid of them. Lessons could be learned from this about the government taking a more proactive position in regard to community safety.

Some of the adverse health effects that PFAS chemicals may have are reduction in immunity, reduced vaccination response, increase risk of allergies in young children, affected growth and learning for children, increased cholesterol levels, lower fertility, metabolic diseases, increased risk of some cancers, and endocrine disruption.

The government needs to act quickly to protect people from further exposure. Funded widespread testing of products available in Australia needs to be done to inform the community how to avoid their exposure. Pushing that responsibility onto individuals is unfair as individuals don't have the ability or access to get this information.

These chemicals are called as forever chemicals because they do not readily break down. In the environment they can persist for up to 1000 yrs. In the body they may take up to a decade to be eliminated through our kidneys. These chemicals should only ever have been used when there was no other option and the need was exceptional. Instead these chemicals are often used just to make production easier, cheaper and faster.

There is too much pressure on individuals to access information about safety of the products we buy. We need a labelling system that can inform us when we need to be

cautious. Any product that contains substances that can harm should carry a warning. This warning gives consumers the chance to choose. It would also promote the use of substances that don't require a warning. Industry will adapt if the government sets strong standards. Governments have the capacity to protect citizens from these chemicals but they often choose to protect industry instead.

I try to find products that don't contain harmful chemicals and some of my info comes from a US website called Mamavation.com this site tests products to see what brands contain what levels of PFAS chemicals and also other harmful chemicals. It is an invaluable source of information but sadly doesn't necessarily translate to Australia because the brands aren't usually available in Australia and if they are, they may not necessarily be made from the same source. But this type of information would be really good for consumers. The government needs to ensure that consumers can have easy access to current information on where these chemicals are present, because it is too hard for individuals to get all of this information. Individuals can't test all of the green teas at a supermarket to see which ones have which PFAS chemicals. The mamavation website found 6 of 12 brands of green tea had PFAS chemicals, 4 of 12 had 'quantifiable' amounts of PFAS. 3 of the 12 had PFOA chemicals in the green tea leaves. Green tea isn't something that the majority of Australian consumers would associate with a harmful forever chemical. We as consumers need this information so that we can make informed choices about the products we buy. It is time to put consumer health before the profits of industry.

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