Ban all PFAS? A new study shows that not all chemistries are created equal

(BPT) - By Jay West, Executive Director of the Performance Fluoropolymer Partnership

News stories about per- and polyfluoroalkyl substance (PFAS) in drinking water and consumer products have raised a lot of questions about this diverse group of chemistries. One thing that's often overlooked in the discussion of PFAS is the fact that all PFAS are not the same.

Take fluoropolymers, for example: highly specialized polymers that play a critical role in American industries, including semiconductors, medical devices, automobiles and renewable energy production. Despite their contribution to vital technologies and American competitiveness, some interests are pushing to ban the use of all PFAS, including fluoropolymers, regardless of whether equally safe and equally performing options are actually available.

A new study by the American Chemistry Council's Performance Fluoropolymer Partnership (PFP), a trade organization of fluoropolymer manufacturers and users, shows that 14 fluoropolymers meet internationally accepted criteria used to identify polymers of low concern (PLC) to human health and the environment. The study, published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal, examined factors like chemical composition, reactivity, purity and stability. It also considered factors like the size of fluoropolymer molecules and whether they dissolve in water, which can be predictive of potential uptake by the body and movement through the environment.

The study builds on previous work that examined four other fluoropolymers against the PLC criteria. When taken together, the two studies cover the types of fluoropolymers that represent 96% of the global fluoropolymers market. But even more importantly, the study further demonstrates that all PFAS are not the same.

Why is that important? As media coverage of PFAS increases, some voices in Washington and state capitols are proposing overly broad laws and regulations that would ban the use of every PFAS chemistry. But the science simply doesn't support that kind of approach. Unduly generic policies could threaten fluoropolymer manufacturing and availability, having an enormous impact on numerous industries that are the backbone of our nation's economy and create the products Americans use and depend on every day.

Regulating all PFAS as a single group is neither scientifically accurate nor appropriate. Fluoropolymers that meet the criteria for polymers of low concern should not be swept up in laws and regulations intended to address other PFAS chemistries with completely different properties and uses.

Efforts to identify and mitigate concern about PFAS must be based on a sound scientific foundation. The PFP's new study demonstrates clearly that all PFAS are not the same and that fluoropolymers meet criteria for identifying polymers of low concern to human health and the environment. Lumping fluoropolymers into the same laws and regulations as other PFAS with completely different properties could threaten the future availability of vital fluoropolymer technologies and the industries that rely on them.

To learn more about the study, visit FluoropolymerPartnership.com.