

The Problem With PFAS

PFAS, or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, are a class of man-made chemicals used in a variety of consumer goods that can persist in the environment indefinitely (earning them the nickname “forever chemicals”).

PFAS have been around since the 1940s, and are used in everyday products such as nonstick cookware, water resistant clothing, firefighting foam, stain resistant carpet treatments, and even dental floss and cosmetics. More recently, manufacturers are utilizing these chemicals in fiber-based compostable food ware packaging to make them water and grease resistant.

Potential Impacts

Research into the potential impacts of these “forever chemicals” points to serious human health and environmental problems, including birth defects, liver disease, kidney cancer, and high cholesterol.

While much of the focus to date has been on PFAS contamination in drinking water, composters and environmental leaders are beginning to raise concerns that the chemicals in compostable food ware such as paper plates and fast food containers are contaminating our commercial compost as well.

Testing reveals that these chemicals are not destroyed by the composting process. When that compost is used, PFAS could be taken up by plants and ultimately accumulate in our bodies through food that is grown with that compost.

Solutions: A Focus On Food Ware



Avoid disposable food ware and packaging and use reusable containers instead.

Skip food packaging by eating fresh food and preparing food at home. Opt for restaurants that serve food in reusable food ware instead of disposable packaging, and bring your reusable container for to-go food and leftovers.



Buy BPI-certified compostables.

Starting January 1, 2020, all Biodegradable Products Institute (BPI) certified compostable packaging must be free of PFAS.

