

Eric Artz, President & CEO
REI Co-Op
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December 8, 2021

Re: Give your customers the gift of a PFAS-free future this holiday season

Dear Mr. Artz:

REI has long been known for being a popular retail and outdoor recreation services business that stands by its top-quality gear, stewardship of the outdoors, and sustainability of its business. With a long history of putting people and the planet over profits, especially with its #optoutside campaign, we admire REI for its strong values and passion for the outdoor environment.

That's exactly why we believe REI should lead the outdoor apparel industry in a bold transition away from the entire class of toxic PFAS "forever chemicals." This holiday season we are asking you to give your customers the gift of a PFAS-free future.

We are very concerned REI is allowing PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) chemicals, which are harmful to public health and the environment, to be used in products sold in its stores, such as jackets and hiking pants. As one of the largest retailers in the outdoor industry and a business renowned for its commitment to sustainability, REI has a responsibility to lead a bold and aggressive phase-out of all PFAS in all of the products it sells.

Hikers vow to "leave no trace." But toxic PFAS chemicals are being used in products sold at REI for waterproofing and stain resistance, and they come at a very heavy cost, leaving a trail of toxic pollution in our bodies, breast milk, food, air, and drinking water. And they can last forever in the environment for generations to come.

Exposure to PFAS has been linked to cancer, a weaker immune system, and liver and kidney toxicity. Communities located near PFAS manufacturing facilities such as Parkersburg, WV, Fayetteville, NC, and Decatur, AL, are especially at risk and vulnerable to these dangerous and toxic exposures. The toxic trail of PFAS pollution impacts people, fish, and wildlife, including salmon, orcas, and dolphins, as well as some of the most precious places on the planet such as the Arctic.

REI's announcement of a phase-out of PFAS chemicals in a handful of product categories is only a small step that is nowhere near the scale that's needed to address the PFAS pollution crisis. Recent studies show breast milk is contaminated by toxic PFAS pollution, and detections of current-use PFAS in breast milk are doubling every 4 years. These are the very same chemicals used to make outdoor gear sold at REI.

REI has a climate commitment to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 55 percent by 2030 and offset emissions for its brand and operations starting in 2020. There is no mention of reducing toxic chemicals, such as PFAS, in its supply chain as part of its climate plan. However, in some cases, the potent greenhouse gas pollutant HCFC-22 is used to make PFAS and is emitted from manufacturing plants that make PFAS for textiles. For example, Daikin America, known to produce PFAS for textile and other uses, reported releasing a total of 240,584 pounds of HCFC-22 from its Decatur, Alabama, facilities in 2019 – the greenhouse gas equivalent of more than one billion pounds of carbon dioxide.

More and more states are stepping up to regulate PFAS. In REI's corporate headquarters state, the new Safer Products for Washington law gives the state agency the authority to ban PFAS in products. The law was adopted to protect sensitive populations such as babies as well as sensitive species such as salmon and orca whales where toxic chemicals build up. Apparel and outdoor gear have already been identified as sources of PFAS, and regulations are not far behind. Other states including California, Colorado, Minnesota, Maine, and New York are targeting products for PFAS bans as well. It is prudent for REI to get out in front of these regulations and phase PFAS out on an aggressive timeline.

We recommend REI take the following steps to prevent PFAS pollution from products sold in its stores:

1. **Policy:** Adopt and publish a bold policy to phase out and ban the entire PFAS class in all brand-name and private-label products REI sells, especially outdoor apparel. This policy should have senior management-level engagement and accountability for suppliers (e.g., third-party testing and disclosure) and measure and publicly report on continuous improvement toward reducing, eliminating, and safely substituting PFAS.
2. **Goals and metrics:** Set clear, ambitious public goals with timelines and quantifiable metrics to measure success in eliminating PFAS in all products and packaging.
3. **Avoid regrettable substitution:** Invest in assessing the safety of alternatives to PFAS using tools like GreenScreen, ChemFORWARD, and Scivera to ensure informed substitution so that suppliers do not move to other harmful replacement chemicals.
4. **Transparency:** Embrace "radical transparency" to meet rising consumer demand for the full public disclosure of alternatives used to replace PFAS. Your members have a fundamental right to know.
5. **Stay ahead of and support government regulation:** REI should also support state and federal policy reform to advance solutions to PFAS.

When REI members and customers buy presents for their friends and family from REI this holiday season, they expect the products to be safe, not laden with chemicals that are leaving a toxic trail of pollution around the world. This holiday season, we urge you to give the gift of a PFAS-free future for your members, and "opt out" of PFAS.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

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