

EPA Bans Two Cancer-Causing Solvents: Trichloroethylene (TCE) and Perchloroethylene (PCE)

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The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has announced a ban on Trichloroethylene (TCE) and Perchloroethylene (PCE), two solvents widely used in various products but linked to cancer and other severe health risks. The ban highlights the EPA's regulatory authority under the 2016 amendments to the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA). The 2016 TSCA amendments granted the EPA expanded authority to evaluate and regulate chemicals posing "unreasonable risks" to human health or the environment.

Under TSCA, the EPA must assess the conditions of use for chemicals and propose risk management measures based on scientific evaluations. For TCE and PCE, the EPA's risk determinations in 2020 and 2022 determined that the chemicals posed significant risks under almost all conditions of use.

Key Aspects of the Ban

The EPA's final rule prohibits (over a time period discussed below and more specifically in the final rule) nearly all uses of TCE and consumer uses of PCE, while establishing compliance pathways for specific industrial applications.

- **TCE Ban:**
 - A prohibition on most TCE uses within one (1) year, with limited extensions for critical uses such as cleaning aircraft components and medical devices. These uses require stringent workplace safety controls.
- **PCE Phaseout:**
 - Consumer applications and many commercial uses of PCE are banned.
 - A ten (10) year phaseout is applied to PCE in dry cleaning, with new machines prohibited after six (6) months. Existing equipment must adhere to phased compliance timelines based on machine type and age.
 - Certain industrial uses—such as in aviation, defense, petrochemical manufacturing, and adhesives—are permitted but subject to strict worker protection measures under the Workplace Chemical Protection Program (WCPP).

Per the EPA, this rule underscores the EPA's commitment to both balancing public health protections with the needs of critical industries. By phasing out PCE and TCE and implementing strict workplace controls, the EPA seeks to reduce exposure while facilitating a transition to safer

alternatives. The rule poses significant challenges for industry, especially dry cleaners, including the need to adapt production lines, secure approvals for alternative chemicals, and implement new safety protocols.

The EPA will host a webinar on January 15, 2025, at 12:30 p.m. EST, to give an overview of the final rule and compliance expectations. Additional compliance guidance for dry cleaning and electrical cleaning applications, will also be released in the next few weeks. EPA Docket EPA-HQ-OPPT-2019-0502, EPA-HQ-OPPT-2016-0732, EPA-HQ-OPPT-2020-0720, [EPA-HQ-OPPT-2020-0642](#); [EPA-HQ-OPPT-2016-0737](#); [EPA-HQ-OPPT-2019-0500](#) (See also, EPA Risk Management for Perchloroethylene (PCE) <https://www.epa.gov/assessing-and-managing-chemicals-under-tsca/risk-management-trichloroethylene-tce>; EPA Risk Management for Trichloroethylene (TCE) <https://www.epa.gov/assessing-and-managing-chemicals-under-tsca/risk-management-perchloroethylene-pce#finalriskevaluation>).