

Is stain-resistance leaving a lasting mark on the environment?

At Fidra, we believe that stain resistance on school uniforms shouldn't come at a high cost to the environment.

Our survey results show that uniforms are washed and replaced at the same frequency, regardless of whether fabrics are 'stain-resistant' or not.

We're asking retailers to phase out unnecessary PFAS-based treatments on their uniforms



What makes clothes stain resistant, does it work, and at what cost to the environment?

- Some stain-resistant treatments are made using chemicals called per- or poly-fluorinated Alkyl Substances, or PFAS. These synthetic chemicals are released into the environment during production, use and disposal of many different products, including school uniforms.
- PFAS have been found all around the worldⁱ, in wildlife and in our own bodiesⁱⁱ. PFAS don't break down easily, so build up in the environment where they may cause harm to some of our most vulnerable speciesⁱⁱⁱ.
- Many supermarkets now offer clothing treated with alternative, PFAS-free, chemical formulas to achieve stain-resistance, which claim to be environmentally friendly. However, we know very little about the chemical composition or environmental impact of these alternatives.

Did you know?



High levels of PFAS have been found in polar bears, at levels that affect their brain function.

Do we really need stain resistant coatings on uniforms?

Is stain resistance making our lives easier? Are stain resistant uniforms helping customers to wash clothes less often, or buy clothes less frequently? We conducted a nationwide survey of over 600 parents and carers of primary age children to find out.

Our results show the opposite. The people who specifically look for 'stain resistance' on labels, bought uniforms more regularly, and washed clothes more often. There is no evidence to suggest that stain resistant finishes make our lives any more convenient.

We found that uniforms were bought yearly, regardless of whether they had been treated with stain resistance or not. This indicates, as expected, that we are not replacing school uniforms because of stains, more likely, it's because of size.

Did you know?

- Stain-resistant coatings on uniforms generally only last around **10-20 washes**
- Stain-resistant coatings are often **less effective** if you use fabric conditioner, and **require heat** to reactivate after washing

What can you do?

- **Read the labels** of skirts, trousers, blazers and shirts before you buy.
- **Visit our website** to find out 'who sells what' and make informed purchases.

ⁱ Giesey JP, Kannan K. Peer Reviewed: Perfluorochemical Surfactants in the Environment. Environmental Science & Technology 2002;36(7):146A-152A.

ⁱⁱ Kato K, Wong L-Y, Jia LT, Kuklennyik Z, Calafat AM. Trends in Exposure to Polyfluoroalkyl Chemicals in the U.S. Population: 1999-2008. Environmental Science & Technology 2011;45(19):8037-8045.

ⁱⁱⁱ Eggers Pedersen K, Basu N, Letcher R, Greaves AK, Sonne C, Dietz R, Styrisshave B. Brain region-specific perfluoroalkylated sulfonate (PFSA) and carboxylic acid (PFCA) accumulation and neurochemical biomarker Responses in east Greenland polar Bears (Ursus maritimus). Environmental Research 2015;138:22-31.