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Perfluorinated Alkylates are industrial chemicals added to clothing, food packaging, lubricants and to home furnishings such as carpets to make them resistant to water, grease and stains. These pollutants are extremely persistent in the environment and bioaccumulate in mammals and fish; they are found in surface water and effluent. They are also detected in the blood of humans and animals, in sperm and maternal cord blood - and in breastmilk ¹.

Levels in breastmilk use the symbol of pure breastmilk to produce shock and spur to action. IBFAN agrees that measurements of levels of these industrial chemicals in human bodies provide a powerful tool to convince policy makers to restrict and ban them. Most of the perfluorinated alkylates are banned or restricted in Europe under the REACH Directive² since 2004, with revisions in 2010, but while production is falling in Europe, it is increasing in China and India.

However, IBFAN warns against the backlash created by the use of alarmist terms to communicate the results; these scares go round the world in seconds via social media and cause uncertainty and distress among mothers, parents and their families.

IBFAN cautions that to create effective pressure, the scientific evidence must be robust. Several omissions and inaccuracies in the study and in reports on the findings raise questions about the methodology: at 11 and 18 months when the tests were made between 1997 and 2000, babies were crawling and in contact with carpets and soft furnishings and drinking water or taking cod liver oil and vitamins that could contain these chemicals. Formula feeding requires water that may be contaminated by these chemicals. The study was conducted in the Faroe Islands of Denmark, where whale meat is an important part of maternal diet and also consumed by children. These facts are only briefly mentioned in the study and the abstract and internet articles omit any reference to them.

¹ Danish Ministry of the Environment Environmental Project No. 1475, 2013 « Survey of PFOS, PFOA and other perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances »

² Registration, Evaluation, Authorization and restriction of Chemicals, the implementing instrument for regulating Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), under the Stockholm Convention of 2004