

Paper Straws and PFAS: The Policy Shift Behind Executive Order 14208

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On February 10, 2025, President Trump authorized Executive Order 14208 (E.O. 14208) revising United States federal policy on paper straw use. E.O. 14208 specifically called on the federal government to stop purchasing paper straws and called for the creation of a National Strategy to End the Use of Paper Straws within 45 days of the order's promulgation.

In March 2025, the Trump Administration released a National Strategy to End the Use of Paper Straws (Paper Straw Report), which in pertinent part identifies its reasoning to eliminate such use as follows: (1) functionality: paper straws lack the structural integrity compared to plastic alternatives; (2) safety: paper straws may be hazardous to children and people with disabilities; (3) health: paper straws may contain per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) chemicals linked to major health conditions; (4) equal protection: paper straws may be burdensome for Americans with disabilities; (5) environmental impact: plastic straws represent an insignificant share of pollution; and (6) cost: paper straws may cost more than conventional plastic straws.

This Paper Straw Report includes a lengthy discussion regarding the health and environmental dangers of PFAS—a class of thousands of synthetic chemicals that are used to make paper straws and other everyday products water-resistant amongst other things. This White House report claims “PFAS are harmful to human health, and they have been linked to harms affecting reproductive health, development delays in children, cancer, hormone imbalance obesity, and other dangerous health conditions.” The report further connects PFAS to paper straws by referencing studies that have found paper (and other plant-based straws) containing significant amounts of PFAS chemicals to make such products resistant to rapid deterioration from contact with grease or other fluids (unlike plastic straws which typically do not contain PFAS).

Despite the Paper Straw Report's discussion of PFAS' health concerns, it is unclear if PFAS policy will be implemented as part of E.O. 14208.