The clock is ticking for the firefighting foam transition

by Hans Huizinga

In 2021, the European Commission issued an important statement with the aim of reducing all emissions of hazardous substances into water and soil to levels that no longer harm human health and the environment by 2050. This ban also extends to the use of PFAS, a substance used in fluorinated fire-fighting foams and many other products.

Developing PFAS-free firefighting foam.

In response to this statement, the manufacturers and users of firefighting foam concentrates have conducted extensive research in recent years to develop PFAS-free firefighting foams, also known as SFFF or 3F. The results speak for themselves, with five manufacturers having brought to market "valid" alternatives to fluorinated firefighting foam. In fact, several PFAS-free firefighting foams have been shown to outperform alternatives containing PFAS. This good news has prompted more and more organisations to consider making the safe switch to fluorine-free foam.

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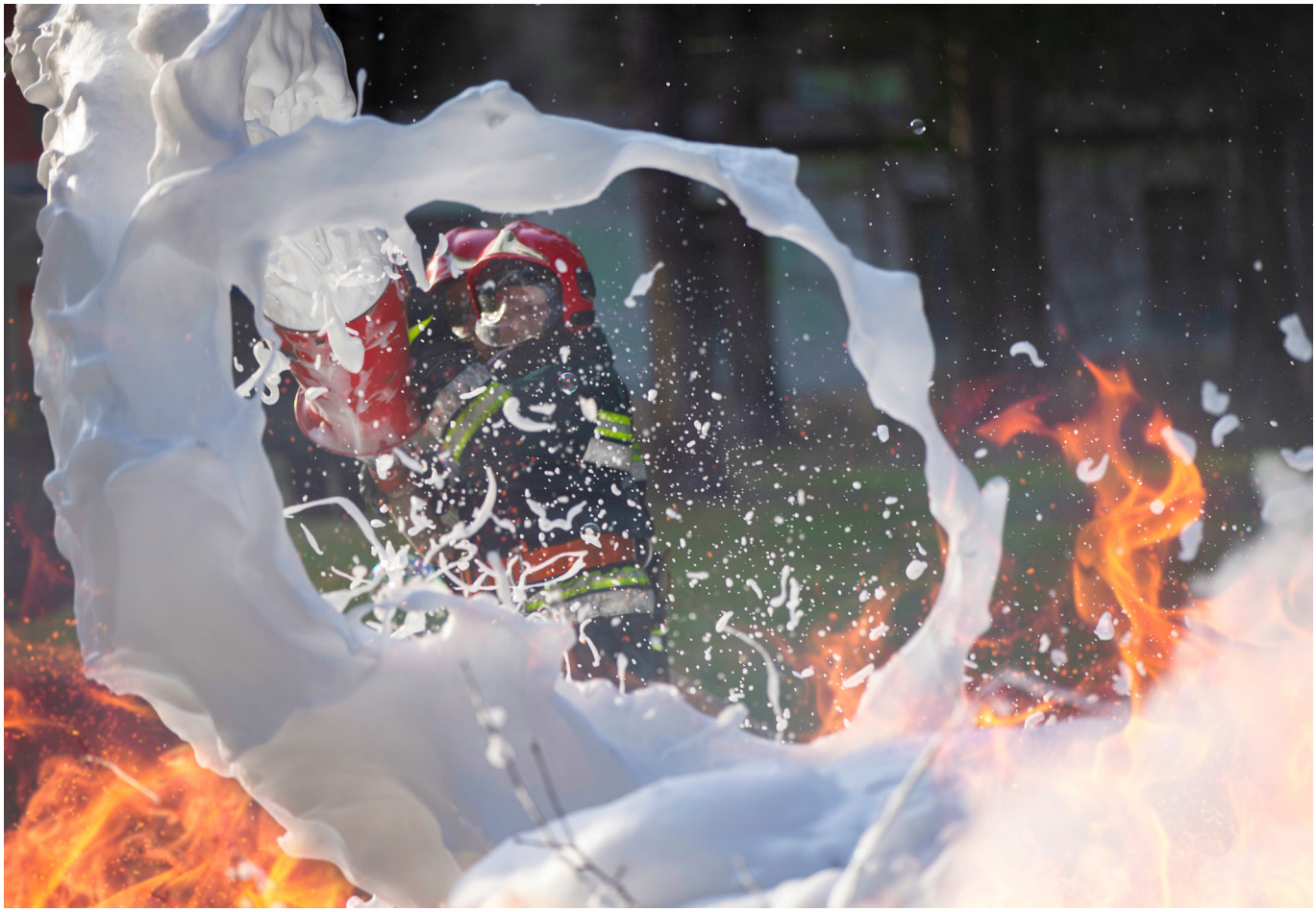

to consider making the safe switch to fluorine-free foam. However, while it appears that the European Commission has set a realistic time frame for this transition, the opposite is true.

Market developments demand faster action.

Changes in the market for firefighting foam concentrate are forcing manufacturers to act quickly, fuelled by various factors. Producers face new regulations and import restrictions that directly affect the raw materials needed for PFAS. This will have widespread consequences that will be felt beyond the firefighting sector alone, with the medical industry, for instance, set to face significant challenges. In the firefighting sector, various manufacturers have already announced their intention to stop supplying firefighting foams containing PFAS by 2024.
Consequently, organisations using these foams will have to realise that they may be unable to replenish their current stock of foam concentrate in the near future. Moreover, more and more producers are feeling the pressures of public opinion and are facing the spectre of legal action due to environmental damage and health risks.

While organisations may think they still have plenty of time to switch from fluorinated to fluorine-free firefighting foam, practical experience has taught us that they will need to act quickly. Organisations looking to make the switch, however, face many questions, such as how to get started, how much time it will take, and what to do with their residual firefighting foam contain PFAS.

Launching Management of Change.

The first step is to launch a Management of Change process, which will provide guidance, structure and clarity for companies looking to safely make the switch to fluorine-free firefighting. This process begins with a thorough analysis of the current firefighting foam system or vehicle, after which the existing fire companies looking to safely make the switch to fluorine-free firefighting. This process begins with a thorough analysis of the current firefighting foam system or vehicle, after which the existing fire scenarios are reviewed in order to assess whether the current system can safely be used in combination with PFAS-free foam.

After the analysis phase, the type of PFAS-free firefighting foam best suited to the organisation's fire scenarios can be determined and any necessary technical modifications to the firefighting system are identified.

Foam transitions are complicated: you cannot simply switch from A to B.

After these phases have been completed, the extinguishing systems are cleaned and/or modified. It is very important to note that firefighting foam transitions are complicated: you cannot simply replace your current foam concentrate containing PFAS with a PFAS-free alternative, as the new foam concentrate can be contaminated by residual PFAS.
For the transition to be safe, organisations must go through a highly detailed cleaning and sampling procedure and dispose of any contaminated flushing agents in an environmentally friendly manner.

Once your extinguishing foam system has been modified, the entire process must be validated as part of Management of Change'.
An audit must show that all phases were carried out correctly, and extinguishing tests are needed to verify that the firefighting foam system works as expected and that the fluorinated foam is mixed at the right ratio.

Do not jeopardise your licence to operate.

Organisations urgently need to get the ball rolling on the transition to PFAS-free firefighting foam.

Make sure that your “licence to operate” is not jeopardised due to a lack of suitable firefighting foam concentrate.

Take action now and seek expert advice from specialists like Kenbri Fire Fighting to safely navigate this impactful process.

For more information about KENBRI's 'FOAM TRANSITION PROGRAM', scan the QR code:

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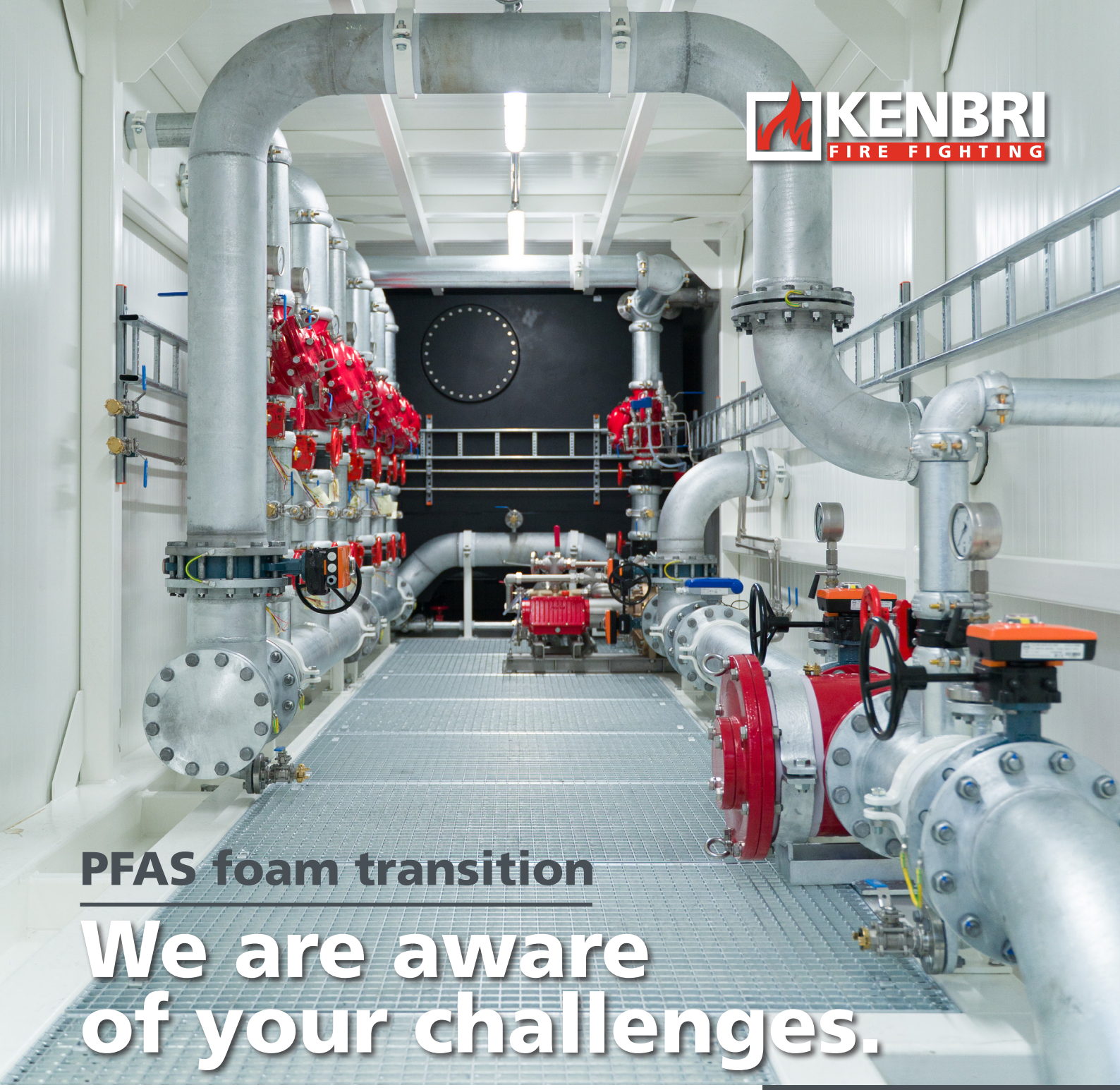
This article was presented to you by:

Hans Huizinga

Joined Kenbri Fire Fighting in 2021 after a career as an instructor and firefighting expert for special projects.
Having started off as a Sales Engineer, Hans is now a Fire Safety consultant, advising on all aspects of Industrial Fire Fighting with an emphasis on Fire Fighting Foam Concentrates and Fire Fighting Foam systems. In his spare time, Hans is also a volunteer firefighter in his hometown.

hans.huizinga@kenbri.nl



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