

Forever chemicals: Second law firm instructed by residents in most PFAS polluted town

Pippa Neill

20 Nov 2024

An international law firm has revealed it has been instructed to “bring legal action” over PFAS pollution in the UK’s most known PFAS-polluted place, becoming the second legal practice to be instructed by residents of the Yorkshire town.



Benthams high street. Source - Rob Whitrow, ENDS Report



In May this year, an [ENDS investigation revealed](#) that the small rural town of Benthams, North Yorkshire, is the most PFAS-polluted place known to exist in the UK. The town is home to firefighting foam manufacturer Angus Fire.

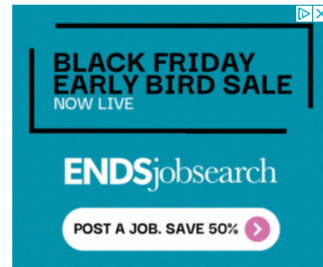
PFAS, short for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances and commonly known as ‘forever chemicals’ owing to their persistence in the environment, are a family of about 10,000 chemicals that have been linked to a wide range of serious illnesses, including certain cancers. They are used in a huge range of consumer products, from frying pans to waterproof coats, but one of their most prolific uses is in firefighting foams.

Earlier this week, [ENDS reported](#) that, acting on behalf of residents, law firm Leigh Day has been instructed to investigate a case against Angus Fire as a result of “alleged PFAS pollution in Benthams”.

Law firm Mishcon De Reya has now also announced that acting on behalf of Cleaner Benthams – a grass roots organisation made up of concerned residents and business owners in Benthams and which was established on the back of ENDS’ initial investigation – it has been instructed to “bring legal action” over PFAS pollution in Benthams.

READ MORE: [God's own Dark Waters? Exposing how a Yorkshire town became the most PFAS polluted place in the UK - and how the regulator let it happen](#)

A statement from the firm said it will work with Cleaner Benthams “in relation to claims arising from PFAS contamination detected in shockingly high concentrations in the town of Benthams.”



Compliance Search

NEW
FEATURE

Discover all ENDS content in one place.

Emily Nicholson, partner at Mishcon de Reya, said: "PFAS contamination is widely known about and is understood to have devastating consequences for both the health of those impacted and for the environment and is extremely difficult to remediate. The people of Bentham deserve to have the full facts about the extent of the contamination, the effects of this pervasive chemical and to obtain damages where they have suffered with their health or otherwise."

A spokesperson for Angus Fire said "we are aware of the statement issued by Mishcon, but we have not received notice of any legal action."

In the past 25 years, nearly 10,000 court cases [have been filed](#) in the US alleging harm from PFAS exposure. Some of these cases have already resulted in multi-billion pound settlements. However, the action against Angus Fire would represent the first ever PFAS-related legal case in the UK.

Nicholson added: "PFAS cases have made huge waves in the US, but this would be the first time such a case has been brought here in the UK."

Following ENDS' initial investigation, the [Bentham Town Council asked](#) Angus Fire to test the environment on Duke Street - a narrow residential road next to the factory - for PFAS.

The test results, which were made available to residents in October, [revealed that](#) soil adjacent to gardens on Duke Street is contaminated with elevated levels of PFAS. The land, which is used for growing food, is owned by Angus Fire and is made available for use to residents. Residents were advised to wash and peel vegetables grown on this land, to clean their homes of dust regularly and to remove shoes before entering their homes.

Matt Young, a Bentham resident and chair of Cleaner Bentham, said: "Residents of High Bentham are devastated at how this has affected the town, its residents and other affected communities down the river Wenning. We are worried about the effect this might have on not only our families' health but, the health of anyone else affected by the pollution down the river Wenning, into the Lune and beyond."

Mishcon de Reya has said that Bentham residents who are concerned about PFAS pollution can contact PFASBentham@Mishcon.com.

An Angus Fire spokesperson said: "We recognise the concerns about potential environmental impacts from historic operations at our facility and regret the inconvenience and worry that this has caused.

"Meanwhile, Angus continues to work closely with independent industry-leading environmental consultants and in cooperation with our UK regulator, the Environment Agency, to better characterise the Bentham site and surrounding areas. These further investigations will help us better understand the extent of any PFAS contamination and assist in determining the remediation required."

including legislation summaries to keep up to date with compliance deadlines

Opens in a new tab/window

Compliance Deadlines

NEW
FEATURE

Plan ahead with our Calendar feature highlighting upcoming compliance deadlines

-Choose an area-

Related Articles

1-3 of 5

Forever chemicals: Residents poised to launch first UK PFAS legal claim against firefighting foam firm

Gardens used to grow food in most PFAS-polluted town contaminated with forever chemicals

REVEALED: The links between a Yorkshire foam firm and 9,000 PFAS lawsuits

Most read

1-3 of 5



Swimmer broadens sewage claim against water firm in wake of Supreme Court judgment



Forever chemicals: Residents poised to launch first UK PFAS legal claim against firefighting foam firm



'Lobbying from waste industry' holding back progress, says former DEFRA civil servant