

Swiss voluntary agreement for the use of SF₆ in Particle Beam Accelerators (Electron and Proton Beam Accelerators)

Guidelines for reducing emissions from particle beam accelerators

Being aware that SF₆ is classified as a very stable and effective greenhouse gas, Swiss users and manufacturers of particle beam accelerators containing SF₆ act according to the following principles: Emissions of SF₆ shall be avoided if possible.

From 2026, manufacturers and users aim at limiting SF₆ – emissions in Switzerland to less than 0.25 tons per year from the operation of particle beam accelerators.

The companies endorsing this declaration subscribe to the following measures:

- When purchasing new or replacing old equipment SF₆-free technologies are used wherever technically possible.
- During installation, operation and maintenance of SF₆-containing particle beam accelerators measures in line with the most recent techniques are implemented in order to avoid emissions of SF₆.
- The same applies to manufacturing, transportation and storage of SF₆, as well as to all arrangements in connection with re-use, recycling or disposal of SF₆.
- To the extent possible, gas-filled compartments are permanently monitored in order to detect and quickly repair any leakage of SF₆.
- Operators keep the leakage rate under normal operating conditions to less than 3 per cent per year.
- SF₆ is used in closed systems.
- Manufacturers of systems containing SF₆, SF₆ distributors, SF₆ users and SF₆ disposal companies are committed to ensure that used SF₆ is re-used. For SF₆ that cannot be re-used, environmentally correct disposal is assured. SF₆ manufacturers and distributors will provide partners with the information required to ensure proper disposal.
- SF₆-handling staff is trained on a regular basis.
- Maintenance is carried out by qualified staff only.
- Operators of industrial particle beam accelerators urge equipment manufacturers to improve their technology in order to reduce SF₆-emissions.
- In the event of an accident, the following information will be recorded in writing and submitted to Swissmem as part of the annual reporting: a description of the incident, a calculation or estimate of the SF₆ gas losses, the results of the investigation to establish the cause, and a list of the improvement measures to be implemented. An exchange of experiences between the bodies responsible for the voluntary agreement and with the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), while respecting company and trade secrets, should contribute to avoiding similar occurrences in future, including for other businesses participating in the SF₆ voluntary agreement.
- Manufacturers and distributors of SF₆ keep a statistical record of SF₆ quantities produced and delivered. Operators of industrial particle beam accelerators containing SF₆ and manufacturers of medical particle beam accelerators containing SF₆ keep a record of SF₆ consumption and stocks.

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- Manufacturers and distributors of SF₆ and operators of particle beam accelerators containing SF₆ report these quantities to Swissmem. Swissmem will treat this information as confidential except for the data it is permitted to provide to the FOEN.
- Swissmem will compile an annual SF₆ assessment from this data which provides information about the use of SF₆ in particle beam accelerators in Switzerland.
- In the event that the annual emissions target is exceeded, an investigation into the causes for this will be carried out within the voluntary agreement.
- The stakeholders in the voluntary agreement are initiating a dialogue on a long-term reduction path for SF₆.

Use of SF₆ as an insulating and arc quenching gas¹ in particle beam accelerators

Stock in Switzerland (2025): About 12,3 t in particle beam accelerators in Switzerland.

Application: In sealed, monitored systems. The leakage rate is less than 3 per cent per year.

Lifetime of switchgear: Depending on the installation at least 10 years (x-ray apparatus), or 25 years (electron accelerator), respectively.

Emissions: Quantities emitted are limited during normal use. They occur particularly due to gas transfers for maintenance, partly also due to improper handling during production, testing and maintenance. Larger emissions are possible due to leakage and disturbances in service.

Re-use: SF₆ gas is routinely reclaimed and re-used.

Removal: SF₆ will be safely and properly removed in an environmentally compatible manner.

New technologies without SF₆: No short and medium term solution is available. Taking into account the technical, economic and ecological point of view, no better alternatives to SF₆ as an insulating and arc quenching gas for industrial and medical particle beam accelerators are currently known.

This declaration is part of a voluntary agreement for SF₆ for operators of particle beam accelerators, which is recognised by the FOEN in accordance with Art. 41a of the Environmental Protection Law (USG).

¹ The term "quenching gas" here signifies the use of SF₆ for the purpose of arc quenching.

Voluntary agreement for the use of SF₆, updated July 13, 2026

