

## Firefighter Exposures to PFAS in Firefighting Foam

For release: December 2, 2019

We, the undersigned citizens and organizations, are highly concerned about firefighter exposures to PFAS chemicals. Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a large group of man-made toxic chemicals used to make consumer products resistant to heat, water, or stains.

These chemicals have been utilized extensively in firefighting foams. Human health studies have shown exposure to certain PFAS may affect growth, learning, and behavior of infants and older children, lower a woman's chance of getting pregnant, interfere with the body's natural hormones, increase cholesterol levels, affect the immune system, and increase the risk of cancer.<sup>[1]</sup> Dr. Linda Birnbaum, former Director of The National Institute of Health (NIH/NIEHS), reports these chemicals affect nearly every system in the body.<sup>[2]</sup>

According to federal health officials, "firefighters are expected to have occupational exposures to PFAS."<sup>[3]</sup> "Firefighters who use these products have been shown to have greater exposures as compared to the general population, Dobraca, et al. (2015) (scientists / researchers) compared perfluoroalkyl serum levels of a group of firefighters in California to an adult population from the NHANES (a national health study) survey."

Exposure pathways for firefighters include incidental soil/dust ingestion, dermal exposure, and inhalation. For firefighters, the main route of entry is usually through the respiratory system, especially at incidents."<sup>[4]</sup> PFAS pose a threat to firefighter health, safety and life by using these chemicals in fluorinated firefighting foams. In addition to exposure at incidents, "[f]irefighters may also handle open containers of concentrated foams at the firehouse when topping off the apparatus tank during scheduled maintenance."<sup>[5]</sup>

Fluorine-free foams and gels are available that have been proven just as effective to use. We cannot depend upon industry, and/or associations to self-regulate. "PEER (Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility) is urging EPA to classify all forms of waste contaminated with PFAS as hazardous waste under the Resource Conservation Recovery Act (RCRA) in order to safely manage the PFAS waste from the moment it is generated, while it is transported, treated, or stored, until it is disposed."<sup>[6]</sup>

The Precautionary Principal should be foremost in any selection process, tools and equipment necessary involving our firefighters. Currently, there are no regulatory blocks for fire training centers or fire departments to adopt fluorine-free foams immediately. We must protect those who put their lives on the line every day to protect us!

For these reasons, we call for the following steps to protect the health of firefighters from the risks posed by exposure to PFAS. We are unable to support regulations or corresponding legislation that address only a very few PFAS compounds and that would only address one pathway of exposure such as groundwater.

Continuing to expose firefighters and first responders unnecessarily to PFAS chemicals needs to be addressed immediately. We request:

- Cease the use of all fluorinated firefighting foams immediately.<sup>[7]</sup>
- There should be an immediate recall of fluorinated firefighting foams with an immediate transition to safer fluorine-free firefighting foams and gels.
- Immediately discontinue using fluorinated firefighting foams in training exercises.
- PFAS testing of all fire training centers and fire departments.

**Code PFAS**

**Midwest Environmental Advocates**  
**Citizens for Safe Water Around Badger (CSWAB)**  
**Fire Fighter Cancer Foundation**  
**Traffic Safety Inc.**  
**H&H Chemical, FlameOut**  
**Wisconsin Conservation Votes**  
**Houston Fire Department**  
**Midwest Environmental Justice Organization**  
**Merrimack Citizens for Clean Water**  
**Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC)**  
**Alaska Community Action on Toxics,**  
**Pamela Miller, Executive Director**  
**IPEN, Pamela Miller, Co-Chair**  
**Concerned Friends and Neighbors**  
**Citizens Advisory Committee of Peshtigo, Wisconsin**  
**Westfield Residents Advocating for Themselves**  
**(WRAFT)**  
**Axing Out Cancer**  
**Testing for Pease**  
**S.O.H2O Save Our Water**  
**Fight For Zero**

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<b>Cassandra VonZynda</b>
<b>James Madison USAF firefighter (retired), Naval station Newport firefighter (retired) &amp; Parris Island firefighter (retired)</b>
<b>Paul R Tate</b>
<b>Jim Burgess</b>
<b>Mitchell Gauge</b>
<b>Bradley D. Creacey</b>
<b>Heather Creacey</b>
<b>Christopher Donahue</b>
<b>Cynthia Walter</b>
<b>Linda Shosie</b>
<b>Sara Bergeson @OneWithSaraJ</b>
<b>Geoff Zipper</b>
<b>Geoff Zipper I have Bladder Cancer from exposure to AFFF foam or PFOS from my 36 years service I NSW Fire Rescue</b>
<b>Joe Anderson USAF Veteran Firefighter</b>
<b>Scott McKay</b>
<b>Alan Carroll</b>
<b>Cindy Ell, Founder / President Fire Fighter Cancer Foundation</b>
<b>Mark A. Favors</b>

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<b>Kayla Furton</b>
<b>Dean Furton</b>
<b>Cathy Miller</b>
<b>Ryan Miller</b>
<b>Geoff Zipper (Australia) retired after 36 years service with bladder cancer NSW Fire Rescue</b>
<b>Bettye Smith - Houston Texas Fire Wife</b>
<b>Jennifer Malpass</b>
<b>Mynnette Williams</b>
<b>Rae Kubiak</b>
<b>Eden Prigmore</b>
<b>Sandra Rogers</b>
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<b>Nancy Roberts</b>
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[1] <https://pfas-1.itrcweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/pfas-fact-sheet-afff-10-3-18.pdf>

[2] <https://factor.niehs.nih.gov/2019/5/feature/1-feature-pfas/index.htm>

[3] ATSDR Toxicological Profile on for Perfluoroalkyls, Draft for Public Comment, June 2018, <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxprofiles/tp200.pdf>, p. 551

[4] <https://www.fireapparatusmagazine.com/2017/07/10/the-legacy-of-firefight>

[5] *ibid.*

[6] <https://www.peer.org/news/press-releases/forever-chemical-requires-cradle-to-grave-approach.html>

[7] "Congress directed the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to allow airports to use firefighting foam free of highly fluorinated chemicals or PFAS. In 2018, the US Air Force "completed its shift from legacy aqueous film forming foam (AFFF) ... in fire vehicles and stockpiles across the service to a more environmentally responsible firefighting agent." <https://www.defensecommunities.org/blog/active-base-issues/air-force-completes-replacement-of-firefighting-foam/>