
FIRE DEPARTMENT SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Bulletin #10, PFAS Blood Testing for Military Firefighters, February 12, 2021

In a congressionally mandated exposure assessment, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2020 directed: "Beginning October 1, 2020, the Secretary of Defense shall provide blood testing to determine and document potential exposure to perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (commonly known as "PFAS") for each firefighter of the Department of Defense during the annual physical exam..."¹

Testing is being done because of concern for potential occupational exposure and is not considered mandatory. Currently testing is for only six PFAS compounds out of the 9,200+ known by the USEPA at this time. These are: PFOA, PFOS, PFBS, PFHpA, PFHxS and PFNA.² NHANES (National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, CDC blood testing in the US) has been monitoring 12 PFAS since 1999 in participants aged 12 and over.³

Military firefighters do not have to pay for the PFAS blood test. The testing does not include veterans.⁴ Veteran Kevin Ferrara of Wooldrich, PA stated that: "We really need to establish a standard level, because right now, those active duty military and DoD civilian firefighters, they're going to get the blood drawn but then nobody really knows what to do after that."⁵

A helpful Fact Sheet on Medical Testing for PFAS noted: "Knowing PFAS blood levels helps to establish baseline exposure levels and raise awareness so people may be proactive in reducing their exposure." Currently, there is no established treatment for PFAS exposure.⁶

¹ Department of Defense, Memorandum, Transmittal of Facts Sheets for Blood Testing for DoD Firefighters Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances Levels, September 29, 2020, <https://www.health.mil/Reference-Center/Publications/2020/09/29/Memo-transmitting-fact-sheets-for-PFAS-blood-testing-levels>

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*

⁴ E&E News, Pentagon will test firefighters' blood for PFAS. But then what? Bev Banks, E&ENews Reporter, September 1, 2020, <https://www.eenews.net/stories/1063712631>

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Fact Sheet, Published by the PFAS Community Campaign, April 28, 2020, <https://cswab.org/new-fact-sheet-on-medical-testing-for-pfas/>



“Since 1999, CDC has measured several types of PFAS in the U.S. population as part of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). NHANES is a survey that measures the health and nutritional status of adults and children in the United States. In particular, the survey has measured PFOS and PFOA. With the decrease in production and use of some PFAS, the national PFAS levels also have dropped over time. From 1999 to 2014, blood PFOA and PFOS levels declined by more than 60% and 80%, respectively (www.cdc.gov/exposurereport).”

[<https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfas/health-effects/blood-testing.html>]

Long chain PFAS have been replaced with short chain PFAS for which there are less health studies although independent scientists have called out this replacement chemical as a ‘regrettable substitution.’ Dr. Linda Birnbaum, former director of the NIH / NIEHS, has reported although the short chain chemicals may be in the blood for a shorter amount of time, they are no less toxic.