

Professional Firefighters Vermont

PFAS in Firefighting Protective Clothing and Station Wear

Testimony

- Firefighting protective clothing and PFAS
 - PFAS have typically been found in all 3 layers – outer shell, moisture/vapor barrier and thermal protection layer
 - PFAS have been used primarily for repelling liquids – water, bodily fluids and hydrocarbon fuels (diesel and gasoline)
 - Some station wear is also treated with PFAS chemicals for a variety of reasons much like our turnout gear
- Numerous pieces of legislation have been passed that address the removal of PFAS from a variety of consumer goods, however these pieces of legislation have always exempted firefighter protective clothing
- Cancers amongst career firefighters has been steadily increasing with the most recent numbers showing that approximately 75% of active-duty deaths are occupational cancer
 - 2024 IAFF Fallen Firefighter Memorial Service – 195 names recognized
- As the number of fires have declined, the number of cancers has increased prompting the question: Why?
- Numerous studies have shown a connection between our gear and elevated levels of PFAS in our members
- Any PFAS or flame retardants (Brominated) are unacceptable in our gear
 - Besides affecting our health, the manufacturing of these products also places the environment and others in harm
- PFAS-free outer shells on our garments are becoming more common, but the moisture barrier still contains PFAS, the most common is PTFE (polytetrafluoroethylene similar to Teflon)
- PFAS-free moisture barriers have been shown to have high levels of brominated flame retardants which is unacceptable
 - This is due NFPA performance tests which still mandates a vertical flame test
 - Has been a work around for industry
- The IAFF (International Association of Firefighters) is pushing to eliminate these hazardous chemicals from our gear and push industry to develop safer alternatives
- The use of PFAS and/or brominated flame retardants in any layer of firefighting protective clothing is unacceptable.

- Some municipalities have recognized the hazards PFAS present and transitioned to PFAS-free gear – San Francisco and Vancouver, Concord, NH and States are enacting legislation requiring labeling and banning the sale of PFAS gear within a certain time frame – Massachusetts and Connecticut.
- The ask from the Professional Firefighters of Vermont
 - H.250 – Addresses PFAS in firefighting gear requiring labeling and banning the sale of PFAS gear in 2028 (modeled after the Massachusetts legislation).
 - Need to add brominated flame retardants as chemicals that will be banned in firefighting gear/clothing
 - Propose wording to address the current NFPA Performance Standard, specifically the vertical flame spread test, which is an unrealistic test and instead mandate full ensemble testing for gear sold in Vermont