



Joint Statement Regarding PFAS in Fire Fighter Turnout Gear



The International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) and Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association (Metro Chiefs) have come together to notify members of the adverse health risks from fire fighter turnout gear.

Recent studies have shown that all three layers of fire fighter turnout gear contain Per and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS), a class of fluorinated chemicals known as “forever chemicals” which have been linked to cancer and other serious health effects.^{1,2} These studies highlight the risks associated with the materials and finishes used in turnout gear even before it is exposed to its first fire.

Identifying safe and effective PFAS-free materials for turnout gear is a long and challenging process. Until PFAS is fully removed from turnout gear, the IAFF and Metro Chiefs are asking fire fighters to reduce exposure to PFAS in turnout gear by using the following precautions:

- Turnout gear should NOT be taken into firehouse living areas.
- When transporting gear in personal vehicles, it should be in a sealed container or bag, and preferably NOT transported in the passenger compartment.
- Apparatus cabs should be cleaned regularly and after every fire.
- Wash your hands after handling turnout gear.
- Legacy turnout gear should be replaced as new PFAS-free technologies become available.
- Do not wear turnout gear on responses where this level of protection is not necessary.*

The IAFF has been working with researchers, advocacy groups, industry stakeholders, and legislative leaders to help address this issue and remove harmful substances from protective equipment. The IAFF has also recently partnered with the American Cancer Society and hired its first ever Chief Medical Officer to expand cancer research.

Both the IAFF and Metro Chiefs are dedicated to removing PFAS chemicals from turnout gear. The joint efforts will take place before regulatory bodies and in continuing discussions with manufacturers in the critical initiative of eliminating PFAS “forever chemicals” from turnout gear.

The International Association of Fire Fighters and the Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association stand shoulder to shoulder in our combined efforts to rid occupational cancer from the fire service. The time has long passed for occupational cancer to be accepted as “part of the job.” You can do your part, and we urge you to take these steps to reduce your exposure.

We must raise our collective voices and diligently work toward a day when firefighting gear will not be a source of fire fighter illness.

**Wearing all PPE and SCBA during firefighting, overhaul, and while working in smoke is still the best first line of defense when it comes to limiting exposures to fireground contaminants. Following any exposure to the products of combustion, all PPE should be cleaned in accordance with NFPA 1851 to reduce cross-contamination and further exposure.*

References

1. Muensterman DJ, Titaley IA, Peaslee GF, Minc LD, Cahuas L, Rodowa AE, Horiuchi Y, Yamane S, Fouquet TNJ, Kissel JC, Carignan CC, Field JA. Disposition of Fluorine on New Firefighter Turnout Gear. *Environ Sci Technol*. 2022 Jan 18;56(2):974-983
2. Peaslee, G. F.; Wilkinson, J. T.; McGuinness, S. R.; Tighe, M.; Caterisano, N.; Lee, S.; Gonzales, A.; Roddy, M.; Mills, S.; Mitchell, K. Another Pathway for Firefighter Exposure to Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances: Firefighter Textiles. *Environ. Sci. Technol. Lett*. 2020, 7, 594–599.
3. Environmental Protection Agency: <https://www.epa.gov/pfas/pfas-explained>
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: https://www.cdc.gov/biomonitoring/PFAS_FactSheet.html
5. Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry: <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfas/activities/assessments.html>
6. IAFF Position on PFAS: <https://www.iaff.org/news/statement-from-iaff-general-president-edward-a-kelly-on-pfas-lawsuits>