



FIRE DEPARTMENT SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

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The USEPA will likely be designating PFOA and PFOS, just two of the more than 9,000 PFAS¹ chemicals, as hazardous materials this year. Last year the USEPA issued a news release stating “the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) took another important step in implementing the Agency’s PFAS Action Plan by proposing regulatory determinations for perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) in drinking water. Today’s preliminary determinations mark a key milestone in EPA’s extensive efforts under the PFAS Action Plan to help communities address per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) nationwide.”²

Once that occurs, there will be actions that affect the US fire service specifically, Aqueous Film Forming Foams (AFFF). AFFF products have contaminated community drinking resources throughout the United States over many decades. Once the PFAS chemicals are labeled hazardous materials, that changes the game. Fire departments will be looking at greater disposal costs and possible fines for the use of AFFF.

At present, communities around airports are learning quickly of the PFAS contamination issues the fluorinated firefighting foams have brought to them. The same concerns are occurring near US military bases that have used AFFF in training or in actual use.

LASTFIRE, the international forum of petrochemical companies, has been much more proactive than the US fire service and the US Department of Defense in recognizing the need to change over to fluorine-free firefighting foams.³ LASTFIRE advocates for cradle to grave coverage of foams. In some instances, they may not use foam at all. These companies cover specialized fires of Large Atmospheric Storage Tanks (above ground) usually involving petroleum products. Risk management is a key principle of LASTFIRE.

1 Maryland Matters, Opinion: Pass the PFAS Protection Act, Jesse Chladil, March 16, 2021, http://www.iosconews.com/news/article_535054d4-7b75-11eb-8b24-ab97ec52fb20.html

2 EPA Announces Proposed Decision to Regulate PFOA and PFOS in Drinking Water, Feb 20, 2021, <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-announces-proposed-decision-regulate-pfoa-and-pfos-drinking-water>

3 Press Release, LASTFIRE Foam Application Tests, Dallas Fort Worth Airport, November 2018, <https://48h57c2l31ua3c3fmq1ne58b-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/LASTFIRE-DFW-Testing-Press-Release.pdf>

Foam Exposure Committee

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Photo by Don Drent

“There is growing concern over the use and discharge of AFFF at airports.”¹

If an October 2018 Act of Congress – the 2018 Reauthorization bill - is not enough to push the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to change over to fluorine-free firefighting foams, what is next? This bill includes a mandate to stop requiring the use of fluorinated foams at airports no later than 3 years from the date of enactment. That date is: October 5, 2021.

1 Federal Aviation Administration, National Part 139 CertAlert, Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF) Testing at Certificated Part 139 Airports, 10/29/2019, https://www.faa.gov/airports/airport_safety/certalerts/media/part-139-cert-alert-19-02-AFFF.pdf