

What have PFAS got to do with firefighters? Questions? Answers

1. Why are PFAS chemicals in your firefighting foams? PFAS chemicals have been used in Class B foams for decades. PFAS are perfluorinated chemicals known to cause health effects. Since some Class B firefighting foams are used as wetting agents and Class A foams, they may also contain these chemicals.
2. What are fire service organizations doing to address this issue? The International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) would like to see the change over to non-toxic foam. The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) has acknowledged the increasing awareness of health threats posed by fluorinated chemical exposure and contamination.
3. Should firefighters be training with Aqueous Film-Forming Foams (AFFF)? No. Many states now have laws regarding using PFAS used during firefighting actions which carry fines. Legislation has either been enacted or there are proposed regulations on AFFF in 33 states at present.
4. What is the military doing? In 2018, the US Air Force completed its shift from AFFF. A timeline has been established by the Department of Defense to shift away from AFFF use.
5. What are airports doing? Airports cannot make any changes until they receive an updated Cert 139 from the FAA. The FAA must wait on direction from the Department of Transportation and the Pentagon. Cleaning apparatus of AFFF is a problem.
6. Are there alternatives? Yes, fluorine-free foams are greatly improved. LASTFIRE, a consortium of 16 international petrochemical companies, conducted live tests of firefighting foam in Dallas Ft. Worth Airport in October 2018. The fluorine-free foam performed “exceptionally well” with both application rates and methods of containment. Some airports have already made the conversion to F3 foams.
7. If PFOA and PFOS are no longer manufactured in the US, why bother to regulate them? PFOA and PFOS are still imported and used within the US. PFOA and PFOS can be created through biotransformation from other PFAS compounds present in our environment.
8. Are replacement PFAS compounds, like C6, safer than older legacy PFAS, like C8? There are thousands of known PFAS compounds. In general, both replacement and older PFAS compounds pose similar risks to human health. Some of the newer C6 compounds are now proving to be even more toxic than the C8 compounds.
9. Have the risks associated with exposure to PFAS been established for human health? Weren't some of the studies based on animals? Yes, human health standards are sometimes derived from animal studies. Experimenting on humans is illegal. Large populations of people who were unknowingly exposed to PFAS have been studied with a strong correlation to a number of serious health risks, including cancer, were found.
10. Is there a Health Advisory Level (HAL) for PFOA and PFOS in drinking water? USEPA is presently in the process of establishing lower Health Advisory Levels (HAL).
11. How have firefighting foams impacted US drinking water? According to the Environmental Working Group (EWG), 110 million Americans may have PFAS levels in their drinking water. Laboratories have been able to test for certain PFAS for over 30 years. PFAS chemicals are found in 99% of Americans' blood.