



Joint Statement Regarding PFAS in Fire Fighter TurnoutGear

June 1, 2023

To all BC Fire Departments and Fire Service Members,

As you may already be aware, the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) and Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association (Metro Chiefs) issued a [joint statement](#) to notify members of the adverse health risks from fire fighter turnout gear.

The BC Professional Fire Fighters Association (BCPFFA) and Fire Chiefs Association of BC (FCABC) are working closely together to ensure best practices are followed in light of the recent studies that 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.

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 BCPFFA and FCABC 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;
- Members should avoid wearing Turnout gear at community or charitable events and use alternative apparel;
- Use alternatives such as coveralls for training unless turnout gear is essential for the training exercise;
- We suggest that all locals work with their fire department management on a policy around this.



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As stated in the [joint statement](#), 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 BCPFFA and the FCABC stand together 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 fire fighting gear will not be a source of fire fighter illness.

**Wearing all PPE and SCBA during fire fighting, 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.*

Sincerely,

Todd Schierling
President, BCPFFA

Dan Derby
President, FCABC

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