

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS



LEGISLATIVE ISSUES

FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AND SENATORS

31ST CANADIAN LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

APRIL 14-16, 2024 | OTTAWA, ONTARIO | #IAFFCDNLEG

FROM THE GENERAL PRESIDENT

DEAR MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT OR SENATOR,

On behalf of the 29,500 Canadian members of the International Association of Fire Fighters, I present a copy of our 2024 Legislative Issues Briefing Book. This book will give you a better understanding of the critical federal policy issues impacting Canada's professional fire fighters and paramedics.

The men and women of the IAFF proudly serve as the first line of defense in nearly 200 cities and towns across Canada. They are all-hazard responders; whether the call is for a fire, medical emergency, or natural disaster like a wildfire, our members are ready to protect the lives and property of their fellow citizens.

Improving the fire service requires assistance from elected leaders like you. The decisions you make on Parliament Hill directly impact our members' ability to do their jobs safely and effectively. IAFF leaders and members from across the country will gather in Ottawa April 14-16 to meet with their

elected representatives. I hope you will meet with members from your area to hear their concerns and understand how the issues outlined in these pages are impacting public safety.

Please know that our entire IAFF staff stands ready to assist you in keeping our members – and their communities – safe while they are on the frontlines protecting Canadians.

Sincerely,



Edward A. Kelly
General President



DETERRING ASSAULTS AGAINST ON-DUTY FIRE FIGHTERS/PARAMEDICS

On New Year's Eve 2019, Winnipeg fire fighters responded to an alarm at a downtown building. When they arrived on scene, expecting to perform their duties and protect lives and property, they were instead attacked by a knife-wielding man, resulting in a serious injury to one fire fighter.

While frightening, this unfortunately was not an isolated incident, but part of a growing trend of violence against on-duty fire fighters and paramedics who are merely trying to perform their duties to keep others safe.

Other incidents include a 2021 assault against a fire fighter responding to an alarm at a residential complex in North Bay Ont., death threats uttered against Pembroke, Ont. fire fighters responding to a brush fire in 2022 and an assault against a Toronto fire fighter responding to a fire at a homeless encampment in 2023. Saskatoon paramedics describe being given bulletproof vests as part of their uniforms, and in Vancouver and other cities, fire fighters and paramedics are confronted regularly by combative individuals while responding to opioid overdoses.

A 2020 survey of emergency responders in 117 urban Canadian fire departments conducted by the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) found that 13% of those departments experienced at least one act of violence toward on-duty personnel at structure fires in the past five years, while 40% reported acts of violence towards personnel during medical calls in the past five years.

The IAFF understands that the reasons behind increasing violence toward fire fighters and paramedics are largely rooted in socio-economic problems such as poverty, addiction and mental health, and supports initiatives designed to address those problems in the long term. We also support local training and protocols to help fire fighters and paramedics recognize and protect themselves from potentially violent situations.

In the meantime, the IAFF submits there is a role for the federal government to play in addressing this issue, by amending

the Criminal Code of Canada to facilitate stricter penalties for assaults against on-duty fire fighters and paramedics. Such provisions would serve as a deterrent and help make emergency responders safer while they are protecting Canadians.

The Criminal Code of Canada already protects peace officers and transit operators with provisions designed to deter assaults against those workers. For example, Section 269.01 of the Criminal Code specifies that an assault victim's status as an on-duty transit operator acting in the course of their duties shall be considered as an aggravating factor during sentencing.

The Minister of Justice has the power to amend the Criminal Code to make this change. In the interim, Conservative MP Todd Doherty (Cariboo-Prince George, BC) has introduced Bill C-321, which proposes amending Section 269 of the Criminal Code by adding the following after Section 269.01:

Aggravating circumstance — assault against health care professionals and first responders 269.02 When a court imposes a sentence for an offence referred to in paragraph 264.1(1)(a) or any of sections 266 to 269, it shall consider as an aggravating circumstance the fact that the victim of the offence was, at the time of the commission of the offence, a health care professional or a first responder engaged in the performance of their duty.

Bill C-321 was passed **unanimously** at Third Reading in the House of Commons on Feb. 28, 2024 and moves to the Senate for further consideration.

WHAT WE'RE ASKING

The IAFF calls on the Minister of Justice to amend the Criminal Code to provide for greater penalties for assaults against on-duty fire fighters and paramedics. We also call on Canada's Senators to recognize the broad support behind Bill C-321 and to ensure swift passage of this important legislation in the Senate.

ELIMINATING THE ‘FOREVER CHEMICAL’ PFAS FROM FIRE FIGHTERS’ PROTECTIVE GEAR AND FIRE FIGHTING FOAMS

It’s well known that fire fighters contract cancer and other diseases at higher rates than the general public due to the toxic exposures they experience in the course of their duties. As a result, firefighting practices emphasize proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) usage, decontamination protocols and other measures designed to minimize exposure to carcinogens present in combusted materials.

But it has now been determined that for many decades, fire fighters have been regularly exposed to dangerous chemicals from the very things they use to carry out their duties: the coats and pants that make up their firefighting protective gear contain high concentrations of toxic chemicals called PFAS for the primary purpose of repelling water and oil. Fire fighters are also exposed to PFAS in aqueous film forming foams (AFFF) that are used as extinguishing agents at some airports and military facilities across Canada.

WHAT ARE PFAS AND WHAT RISKS DO THEY POSE?

PFAS (Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) are a large group of more than 12,000 synthetic chemicals not found in nature. Known as ‘forever chemicals,’ PFAS accumulate in the human body and do not degrade in the environment. Studies have shown that PFAS exposure can cause cancer and is linked to metabolic, circulatory, behavioural, digestive, endocrine, immune, neurological and reproductive health problems. As PFAS has accumulated in drinking water and elsewhere in the environment, all Canadians are at risk of exposure and health problems from these dangerous chemicals.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PROTECT FIRE FIGHTERS FROM PFAS?

No more research and studies are necessary to demonstrate that exposure to PFAS causes adverse health effects. The science is well-established. The Government of Canada has already recognized the dangers of PFAS by naming them as ‘chemicals of interest’ in its Chemicals Management Plan and by conducting study and consultation. The federal government should further recognize the urgent need to protect fire fighters from the negative impacts of PFAS through prompt implementation of a series of comprehensive new measures, including:

- Banning the import, manufacture and use of PFAS with no exceptions;
- Identifying PFAS as a full chemical class in the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA);
- Expediting the transition to safe firefighting foams at all federally-regulated facilities;
- Banning incineration and secondary use of items containing PFAS; and
- Biometric monitoring of federal workers exposed to PFAS in the workplace.

The federal government should also specify regulatory requirements for the safe reclamation and disposal of firefighting gear and foams that contains PFAS. Additionally, “take-back” grants must be made available and funded through Health Canada and/or Environment and Climate Change Canada to assist fire departments and municipalities, which are ill-equipped to manage the financial burden of transitioning to safe, carcinogen-free fire fighting gear given the cost of these products.

CURRENT STATUS

With occupational cancer in the fire service at epidemic levels in Canada, virtually every fire fighter continues to be exposed to toxic PFAS chemicals in their protective gear. Fire fighters who work at a number of airports and other federally-regulated workplaces are also at risk of PFAS exposure from AFFF agents.

Some measures to address the presence of PFAS in the firefighting industry have already been initiated. PFAS-free protective gear that meets industry standards is currently being tested in Canada and the U.S., and airports and the military are slowly transitioning to new PFAS-free firefighting foams. While these are welcome advances, they are in their beginning phases. The reality is that the effort and cost associated with fully transitioning from PFAS to safe alternatives, while necessary, will be substantial.

Other jurisdictions have provided good models of regulatory action on PFAS. More than 20 U.S. states have passed or introduced laws restricting the chemicals, ranging from laws that require labeling of fire fighter gear that contains PFAS to banning incineration and secondary use to funding the replacement of firefighting gear containing PFAS. Australia and Sweden have also proposed tough restrictions on PFAS, and in March 2024, the City of Vancouver, BC announced it has begun to phase out fire fighter protective gear containing PFAS.

Canada has an opportunity to be a world leader in protecting its fire fighters and all citizens from the dangers of PFAS by swiftly regulating a series of comprehensive measures to phase out all uses of these dangerous chemicals and to support the transition to safe alternatives.

WHAT WE’RE ASKING

The IAFF calls on the Government of Canada, through Health Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada, to recognize the human health and environmental risks of PFAS and to move quickly to identify PFAS as a full class of chemicals under the CEPA, to ban all uses of PFAS, to support the reclamation and safe disposal of firefighting gear and foams containing PFAS, to assist fire departments and municipalities with the costs of transition to PFAS-free protective gear and to monitor the health of federal workers exposed to PFAS in their workplaces.

STRENGTHENING CANADA'S AIRPORT FIRE FIGHTING REGULATIONS: RECOGNIZING M-96 AND THE NEED TO MEET INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS FOR RESPONSE TIMES AND RESCUE

In the event of an aircraft accident, the potential for mass casualties is real, as the threat of trauma, toxic smoke, and fire can make conditions inside of a downed aircraft lethal in just three minutes. These dangers exist particularly on or near airport runways, where most aviation accidents occur.

This requires services to be in position for rapid response and staffed with enough personnel to initiate the rescue of trapped passengers while working simultaneously to extinguish fires. Having the right resources in place with safe staffing levels, provides for a rapid response in initiating the rescue of trapped passengers while simultaneously working to extinguish fires

The Canadian Aviation Regulations (CARs), which govern Canada's airports, fall well short of airport rescue and firefighting standards such as those published by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) – a world leader in aviation and air passenger safety which is headquartered in Montreal.

Few Canadian airports meet or exceed the CARs requirements, leaving fire fighters at airports including those at several major Canadian airports ill-positioned or improperly resourced to respond quickly in the event of downed aircraft or the need to rescue trapped passengers.

ICAO STANDARDS

ICAO standards clearly identify rescue as a required function of airport firefighters and specify that airport firefighters should be able to reach all points on all operational runways within three minutes. Both the Canadian and U.S. military have adopted this model, which is also included in the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 403 Standard for Aircraft Rescue and Fire-Fighting Services at Airports.

CARS SHORTFALLS

CAR 303, which regulates airport firefighting at Canada's major airports, fails to specify rescue as a required function of airport firefighters and only requires firefighters to reach *the midpoint of the furthest runway* in three minutes. Additionally, the CARs simply specify that airport fire fighters should have a certain number of vehicles and should be able to discharge a certain amount of extinguishing agent based on the number of planes taking off and landing. They do not specify a required number of personnel.

For example, Macdonald-Cartier International Airport in Ottawa – which fielded more than 4 million passengers in 2023 – does not have enough personnel on duty to perform rescue in the event of an aircraft accident. The airport's emergency response plan relies heavily on backup from City of Ottawa firefighters, who may not be on the scene for up to 10 minutes or more, which is far too long to be of any practical assistance when passengers are trapped inside a burning fuselage. In Ottawa and other major cities, there is no guarantee that the closest municipal fire fighters will not be tied up at the scene of another emergency and therefore unavailable when an aircraft accident occurs.

When people are trapped inside a burning home, fire fighters are expected to do much more than spray water or hose down the sidewalk. They enter the structure and initiate aggressive interior fire suppression combined with actively rescuing people who are trapped inside. When that fire is aboard a commercial aircraft at a large Canadian airport, however, the current regulations only

require airport fire fighters to hose down a path through the burning jet fuel and hope the passengers can escape the burning wreckage on their own or with the assistance of flight crews who have just endured the same crash.

M-96

In September 2023, MP Ken Hardie (Fleetwood-Port Kells, BC) introduced M-96 in the House of Commons. This motion, which outlined the shortfalls in the Canadian Aviation Regulations and provided that the government should, without delay, bring the regulations up to ICAO standards with regard to rescue and response times, was adopted in the House of Commons in December. The motion confirmed that a significant majority of MPs agrees that the federal government should act on this important safety issue.

WHAT WE'RE ASKING

To address significant regulatory shortfalls that needlessly put the safety of the flying public at risk, the IAFF asks the Minister of Transport to heed the adoption of M-96 and without undue delay, bring the Canadian Aviation Regulations up to ICAO standards, including specifying the rescue of trapped passengers as a required and resourced function of airport fire fighters at Canada's major airports.

COST IMPLICATIONS

Cost cannot be the overriding factor when it comes to important public safety issues. At the same time, we recognize that the commercial model of Canada's airport industry invites the discussion. Introducing a modest passenger fee, scalable based on airport size and category, could effectively address this challenge. For example, a modest ticket surcharge of under \$2 per passenger could permit an internationally categorized airport to meet ICAO standards.