

Testing DoD Fire Fighters for PFAS

The IAFF supports testing Department of Defense fire fighters' blood for the presence of PFAS during annual medical examinations and encourages members of Congress to co-sponsor the Protecting Military Firefighters from PFAS Act of 2019.

BACKGROUND

For over four decades Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) have been used in aqueous film forming foam (AFFF) used by Department of Defense (DoD) fire fighters. AFFF containing PFAS was once thought to be safe to humans, but that is no longer the case. The Environmental Protection Agency has declared PFAS to be toxic, determining there is no safe level of PFAS within the human body. Toxic PFAS enter the body through inhalation, absorption, and ingestion, and remain in the body for two to nine years following exposure. PFAS are linked to a growing list of health concerns, including thyroid, bladder, kidney and liver cancers, diabetes and elevated cholesterol.

Department of Defense fire fighters have been exposed to AFFF containing toxic PFAS during emergency responses, training, apparatus functional checks and routine maintenance for decades. Once considered a safe substance, DoD fire fighters routinely released AFFF containing toxic PFAS into the environment while engaged in work activities. Sanctioned releases led to the presence of high levels of toxic PFAS in more than 400 drinking water supplies at or near current and former military installations. DoD fire fighters already provide a blood sample as part of their annual physical; adding PFAS testing to a fire fighter's blood panel would allow a fire fighter to seek counseling and guidance from his or her physician if elevated levels are present.

LEGISLATION

House: H.R. 1863, The Protecting Military Firefighters from PFAS Act of 2019
Sponsors: Representative Donald Norcross (D-NJ); Representative Mike Turner (R-OH)

Senate: S.858, The Protecting Military Firefighters from PFAS Act of 2019
Sponsors: Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH); Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK)

Summary: The Protecting Military Firefighters from PFAS Act of 2019 would require the Secretary of Defense to provide blood testing for fire fighters of the Department of Defense to determine potential exposure to Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS.) Blood testing will inform and assist the fire fighter and his/her private physician in monitoring the presence of PFAS within the body. This would allow for medical counseling and establishing treatment protocols for those responders exhibiting related health concerns.