
FIRE DEPARTMENT SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Bulletin #39, Mutual Aid Flip, October 8, 2021

Fire departments have naturally depended upon neighboring fire departments for mutual aid. They could call in airport fire and / or military base apparatus. But, even flowing water through PFAS contaminated apparatus and equipment will cause PFAS contamination. Airports and military bases are required to use Aqueous Film Forming Foams (AFFF) while fire departments have no such regulations requiring AFFF use.

In Michigan, “Selfridge [Air National Guard] replaced 91,000 pounds [2,200 5 gallon pails] of AFFF foam with a new formulation based on different PFAS compounds.”¹ A former base fire chief interviewed in 2016 stated: “AFFF may have been used off the base on mutual aid calls in 2015 at a tanker fire on I-94, a spring 2015 fire at Van Thomme’s Greenhouse and a fall 2013 Chesterfield Township boat fire.”² Heads up to all fire departments that have used AFFF in the past!

After using firefighting foam on two downtown transformer fires in July 2019, the Madison Fire Department in Wisconsin received public pressure after elevated PFAS water contamination was discovered from run-off. The manufacturer reported the foam was more “environmentally friendly than other materials that are available” and “the foam is not linked to the chemical commonly referred to as PFAS.”³ Just over 4 gallons of military grade foam was applied.

But, testing revealed the “foam contained a newer form of PFAS substance called perfluorohexanoic acid, or PFHxA.”⁴ PFHxA is C6.⁵ “PFHxA Perfluorohexanoic acid has been identified as a biodegradation product of an important class of surfactants known as polyethoxylated 2-perfluoroalkylethanol.”⁶

“Local fire departments in the US have been using fluorinated firefighting foams without the full knowledge of their toxicity.”⁷ Fire departments who run fluorinated (PFAS) foams may not now be the ones being called in for mutual aid assistance calls because of contamination concerns.

1 MLive, Selfridge air base is pouring PFAS into Lake St. Clair, Garret Ellison, Jul 24, 2018, https://www.mlive.com/news/2018/07/selfridge_pfas_aff_lake_st_cl.html

2 ibid.

3 WPR, Madison, Fond Du Lac Fire Departments Stop Using Firefighting Foam Containing PFAS, Miranda Suarez, Dec 31, 2019,

4 ibid.

5 Perfluorohexanoic acid (compound), Pubchem, NIH, National Library of Medicine, Compound Summary, <https://pubchem.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/compound/Perfluorohexanoic-acid>

6 Fromel T, Knepper TP; Chemosphere 80: 1387-92 (2010), <https://pubchem.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/compound/Perfluorohexanoic-acid#section=Methods-of-Manufacturing>

7 Firefighting Foam Action in Wisconsin, Maria C. Powell, PhD, Aug 11, 2020, <https://mejo.us/firefighting-foam-action-in-wisconsin/>



There were an estimated 1,115,000 career and volunteer firefighters in the United States in 2018. Of the total number of firefighters 370,000 (33%) were career firefighters and 745,000 (67%) were volunteer firefighters. (U.S. fire department profile, Issued Feb 2020, <https://www.nfpa.org/News-and-Research/Data-research-and-tools/Emergency-Responders/US-fire-department-profile>)

There are 21 joint use military - civilian airports in the geographic United States. (https://www.faa.gov/airports/planning_capacity/joint_use_airports/)

“In the United States, firefighters at around 500 airports are continuing to use a toxic fire foam to fight aircraft fires, despite its link to cancer.” (Broughton Partners, Hundreds of Airports are Still Using Fire Foam, July 22, 2020, <https://www.broughtonpartners.com/hundreds-of-airports-are-still-using-fire-foam/>)