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Hazards Caused by Toxic Firefighter Foam: How Can You Reduce Exposure?

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Extinguishing a fire doesn't reduce every danger attached to the incident. Even though a property and its inhabitants might be safe, the firefighter has placed himself in added danger. If he has been doing this at a stretch for several years, chances are his body is developing some or the other ailment because of the firefighting foam.

We are talking about the AFFF (Aqueous Film-Forming Foam), which is effective in ceasing liquid fires but puts the firefighter's health at risk.

In recent times, the number of AFFF lawsuits has gone up. The current situation is so aggravated that over 180 countries have had to ban its production. It's because AFFF contains PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) that are also called 'forever chemicals'. After all, it stays in the environment and the human body and causes severe damage.

A federal inquiry a few years ago highlighted that PFAS is increasingly dangerous. Hence, here are recommendations regarding safe exposure levels to this compound so that firefighters and others get affected as little as possible. The lawsuits filed suggest that the manufacturers failed to warn users about the dangers of AFFF, which led to the development of cancer, and other life-threatening diseases.

In this article, we will shed light on the health disasters resulting from this toxic foam and what measures people can implement to ensure that there is reduced exposure.

Hazards of AFFF Exposure

According to the Department of Defense, there are more than 400 sites that are highly contaminated with harsh compounds, which include firefighting foam. There are [90 or more military sites](#) that reported either on-or off-base groundwater or drinking water contamination.

PFOS was one chemical that was detected at 3,800 parts/ trillion. It is equal to 54 times more than the security standards established by the Environmental Protection Agency. He has offered this water to his grandchildren as well, and that is what bothers him.

The fact that this chemical is linked with thyroid and prostate cancer is what adds to his worry. Other health hazards that occur because of PFAS exposure are:

- Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma
- Testicular Cancer
- Kidney Cancer
- Breast Cancer
- [Pancreatic Cancer](#)
- Leukemia
- Prostate Cancer
- Bladder Cancer
- Liver Cancer
- Ovarian Cancer

The high cancer risk resulting from AFFF is no longer limited to airport workers, firefighters, the military personnel community, or property owners located close to military bases and airports. According to Chemical & Engineering News, military bases and airports resort to huge amounts of AFFF foams in their training sessions. There have been instances where the PFAS chemical reached the surface water and groundwater supplies and caused damage to the nearby communities.

People like Bob Farnsworth have noticed AFFF exposure differently. After serving as Command Master Chief at Naval Air Base for a substantial time, he realized the negative aspects of the Navy in his life. The water from the well that he used for watering his fruit trees and cooking had three chemicals that came from firefighting foam.

According to the latest [AFFF lawsuit update](#), there is an increasing number of lawsuits, which is effectively raising awareness about firefighting foam. It enables the firefighters to know that every time they use the foam, they welcome some health hazard and should do something about it to ensure they don't develop cancer or any other severe diseases.

The firefighters and other individuals who have been affected by this chemical can file a lawsuit and get the compensation they deserve. TruLaw states that, for this, working closely with a lawyer is ideal, as they can guide you better and use the evidence you provide well. They also ensure you get fair compensation that will help you cover the medical costs and lost wages.

How To Recognize PFAS in AFFF?

It can get a tad bit challenging to know whether AFFF has PFAS. There is no need to report these chemicals on any MSDS (material safety data sheets) as they yet aren't labeled as hazardous substances.

Hence, a good sign that the firefighting foam comprises PFAS is that it mentions C6, fluoroprotein, fluorosurfactant, or even the word "fluoro". But again, it is necessary to note that not every fluorinated surfactant is composed of PFAS. It is a smart idea to connect with the manufacturer if there is no mention of PFAS on the label and get your question answered.

Reducing AFFF Exposure: The Measures to Implement

You can do several things to bring down the AFFF exposure. First, ensure that you opt for AFFF foams that have minimal PFAS levels. Alternatively, you can also make use of fluorine-free foams, which can go a long way toward substituting AFFF.

Recently, some companies have provided an effective way to concentrate PFAS on polluted liquids and an innovative plasma-based technology for bonding hazardous fluorine. It will take some time until the solution becomes commercially viable.

Meanwhile, the following steps can prove to be useful:

- Refrain from dumping AFFF in sewers, landfills, and storm drains
- Ensure you wash your hands well after using AFFF
- Never give away or sell any fluorinated firefighting foam to any regular vendor. Instead, you should throw it away as a toxic chemical.
- Assess the SOPs of your fire department for selecting and using AFFF
- Resort to AFFF for aviation accidents and hydrocarbon fires to save lives and secure essential infrastructure
- Make sure that you don't choose AFFF for any training activities. Instead, resort to specialized foams for the same. These foams simulate AFFF at the time of training without containing PFAS. The firefighters need to know that the lack of PFAS in their training foams indicates that the foams possess less burn-back resistance and aren't apt for actual firefighting.

Once these aspects are considered, AFFF exposure can be reduced to a huge extent. It will ensure that firefighters don't fall prey to the adverse side effects of the toxic foam and get diagnosed with cancer.

Finally, even though research is ongoing, it will take some time to come up with [alternative foams](#) that can replace AFFF. Until then, firefighters should use this foam wisely so that they don't get affected by it. And if they develop a disease or physical discomfort, it is necessary that they first get medical assistance and then seek legal recourse.

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