

UNITED FIREFIGHTERS UNION OF AUSTRALIA



PFAS Policy: December 2019

Historically Australian Fire Services have used "B" Class firefighting foams (3M Light Water, 3M AFFF, Angus Tridol C6) containing perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and/or perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), PFHxS (perfluorohexanesulfonate) known as perfluorinated chemicals (PFCs) or perfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).

These firefighting foams are now referred to as "persistent" firefighting foams.

Persistent firefighting foams were introduced into the Australian fire industry in the 1980s. They were sold and adopted as the universal panacea, the wonder product that would solve the problems associated with hydrocarbon fires. They were universally and extensively used in aviation, military, metropolitan and rural fire agencies. Marketed as benign, non-toxic, cost effective and bio-degradable, it has transpired that none of these attributable characteristics were correct. Our firefighters, the fire agencies in which they serve, the environment and indeed the people of Australia continue to be exposed to PFAS, as the toxic legacy continues to take effect well into the future. PFAS show no sign of biodegradation at all and so have been described as "forever chemicals."

It is incumbent that our Union take a lead role in the future management of the persistent foam legacy.

Purpose:

The purpose of the United Firefighters Union of Australia's PFAS policy is to:

- Educate our members, fire agencies, all levels of government, (local, state and federal) industry, and the wider community about the hazards and issues relating to persistent firefighting foam and the need to ban the use of these products.
- Direct Fire Agencies in the use, management and knowledge regarding the use of persistent foam, the management of affected personnel and equipment.
- Direct Government in the correct and future management of the persistent foam legacy.
- Aid in the development of policy with regard to firefighter health, industry and the environment.

These foams are toxic, environmentally persistent and have contaminated land and water. They are bio-accumulative and bio-magnify. Those exposed to the foam, contaminated water and contaminated soil have reported elevated levels of PFAS in their blood. Studies have reported that there are numerous correlations between elevated PFAS levels in blood and adverse health effects.

The UFU of A recognises that it has a responsibility to our membership and the public to protect them from preventable harm. Our Union supports the precautionary approach to prevent continued exposure to persistent foams, contaminated appliances & equipment, land and water.

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Our Union supports the use of non-persistent foams (such as Solberg RF 3x6 ATC). Non-persistent foams are widely available that replicate the firefighting characteristics of persistent foams.

Our Union supports the removal of all persistent foams from service within Australian Fire Agencies and Major Hazard Facilities and the appropriate ethical destruction of the persistent foam stock.

Our Union supports a nation-wide ban on the importation and use of persistent foams

The International community (Stockholm convention etc) has called for global action on chemical substances that persist in the environment, bio-accumulate through the food-web and pose a threat to human health and the environment.

Our Union will lobby the Australian Government to become a signatory to the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Compounds (Stockholm Convention).
Ratifying Annex B of the Convention.

Our Union will:

- Formally endorse and enforce the MFB PFAS firefighting thresholds limits
- Adopt MFB leading practice on decontamination for stations, training grounds, appliances, equipment and PPE/PPC.
- Educate fire agencies in the use of foams as tactic of last resort at fire grounds
- Create a fire ground reference guide for foam types and composition (education and knowledge delivery)
- Identify and create a list of appropriate non-persistent foams
- Promote pre-planning for foam use and foam inventory within fire agencies and industry (Imbed into pre-planning)
- Work with state EPAs and Workcover Authorities, to access inventory of existing PFAS stocks, so that UFU has knowledge of future risk.
- Ensure the use of ethical and complete PFAS destruction processes and become a lead advocate in the development of destructive process research.
- Adopt the MFB leading practice to encourage Fire Services to use the "polluter pays" policy that specifies that if in the course of duty appliances, equipment and PPC/PPE are contaminated by PFAS, the user will pay for decontamination or replacement of appliances, equipment and PPE/PPC.
- Ensure independent blood testing that is consistent and accurate and ensure that a central provider is identified (EnviroLab)
- Lobby for the expansion of the current Medicare provisions to include testing for PFAS in blood
Define the appropriate levels of PFAS in the blood of the Australian population
Encourage fire agencies to test for PFAS in PPE/PPC
- Ensure that reference to PFAS in PPC/PPE is imbedded in the appropriate Australian Standards.
- Legislate the requirement for sellers of fire-fighting personal protective equipment (PPE) containing PFAS, to notify purchasers of the equipment, similar to USA Washington Senate Bill 6413. Ensure a closer alignment to International PFAS Guidelines such as European and USA.
- Formally endorse and enforce PFAS thresholds recommended by the USA Government Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease registry (ATSDR) Government funding of PFAS soil testing of fire

stations/training grounds. Ensuring this data is published to trigger/alarm the respective fire agencies to fund more extensive PFAS soil and testing and mitigation.

- Encourage federal, State and Territory Governments to litigate against the producers of PFAS (i.e. 3M and DuPont)
- Provide advocacy to the community in relation to PFAS issues.

Wellbeing – in order to protect UFUA members from possible Post Traumatic Stress Injury (PTSI) and related work-related stress, the UFUA will promote and encourage its members to access professional support services including welfare officers, employee assistance programs and relevant medical experts.

Note: UFU of A to ensure education of support services about PFAS and its potential impacts on members