

New York City Moves to Eliminate PFAS from Firefighter Protective Gear

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The New York City Council has proposed a new bill to ban the use of “forever chemicals” in the turnout gear worn by FDNY’s 11,000 firefighters. *See Notice and Provision to Fire Department Personnel of Firefighting Protective Equipment Containing Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances* (Intro. No. 1452, N.Y. City Council Sess., 2025).

Forever chemicals, known as PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances), are a large group of over 16,000 man-made chemicals valued for being water-repellent, grease-resistant, and non-stick. Turnout gear, including jackets, pants, boots, gloves, and other protective equipment that firefighters wear, is treated heavily with certain PFAS, making it resistant to water and heat, and helping the textiles breathe. PFAS are alleged to be linked to cancer, kidney disease, liver problems, immune disorders, birth defects, and other serious health problems. The International Association of Firefighters (IAFF) estimates cancer from turnout gear accounted for 66% of firefighter deaths from 2002 to 2019.

In 2024, Massachusetts and Connecticut became the first states to ban the use of PFAS in turnout gear, followed by Illinois in 2025. The Massachusetts law prohibits the manufacture or sale of any firefighting personal protective equipment containing intentionally added PFAS chemicals and defines PFAS chemicals “as a class of fluorinated organic chemicals containing at least 1 fully fluorinated carbon atom.” *See* Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 111 §245. Connecticut similarly defines PFAS as all members of the class of fluorinated organic chemicals containing at least one fully fluorinated carbon atom. *See* Conn. Gen. Stat. § 22a-903c (2024). The New York City Council bill, as proposed, would follow Massachusetts and Connecticut, defining PFAS as “a class of fluorinated organic chemicals containing at least one fully fluorinated carbon.” The proposed law in New York City would require the FDNY to transition to non-PFAS containing turnout gear by 2028, over two years out. The delay in enforcement could reflect the practical time needed for product development and supply to the large number of firefighters impacted by this bill. It also aligns with national trends, e.g. Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Illinois also have deadlines around 2027-2028.

Further, the National Fire Protection Association, which sets firefighter protective gear standards, has recently updated the standards to allow for PFAS-free turnout gear. Various other departments are either in the process of acquiring PFAS-free gear or have already made the switch. East Providence, RI became the first city in the US to fully transition to PFAS-free gear. San Francisco’s fire department is also making the switch to PFAS-free gear.

The New York City Council bill has the support of the Uniformed Firefighters Association, the union which represents most of the city’s firefighters. Several New York City firefighters are already involved in an ongoing class-action lawsuit against chemical companies and turnout gear producers. The volume of cases filed is so large that the Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation centralized the AFFF-related cases and PFAS firefighter gear lawsuits under MDL No. 2873. Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF) is a fire suppressant used to extinguish flammable liquid fires such as fuel fires. There are currently 10,000+ cases open and pending before the MDL Court. The MDL Court had selected 25 plaintiffs in AFFF-related cases for bellwether trials (test cases) to begin in October 2025. However, in August 2025 the court issued an order vacating the October 2025 AFFF bellwether trials to allow for newly filed cases to apply to the MDL. No PFAS gear cases have been identified for bellwether trials yet.

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