**PFAS Testimony, HF742**

Good afternoon, my name is Shawn Krizaj, and I am the City of Duluth Fire Chief. Thank you for allowing me to testify today on the dangers of AFFF/PFAS firefighting foams and the larger body of chemicals referred to as fluorinated chemicals and their links to increased cancer in firefighters.

PFAS/PFOA/PFOS chemicals may be orally ingested, absorbed through the skin or inhaled through exposure in the atmosphere. FEMA and the U.S. Fire Administration Protection against exposure suggestions website advise that personnel at departments that use firefighting AFFFs with PFAS/PFOA/PFOS should practice the following controls to stay safe from exposure:

* Replace older AFFF stocks with fluorine-free foam solutions.
* Contain and manage AFFF and water runoff.
* Wear personal protective equipment (PPE) and a self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) whenever handling AFFF.
* Properly remove and bag contaminated PPE prior to transporting.
* Use cleaning wipes on your face, neck and hands immediately after exposure.
* Clean contaminated PPE and SCBA before its next use.
* Shower within one hour of returning to the station or home.

The Duluth Fire Department has added these these measures to our internal policies, but now we need your help to reduce continued exposure to other firefighters, and the environment including the pristine shores of Lake Superior. These are considered forever chemicals that don’t break down in the environment. We have contaminated land near the Duluth airport and the 148th fighter wing that continues to threaten ground water and runoff to Lake Superior.

Unfortunately, I have attended several funerals this past year of retired Duluth firefighters. One common theme I hear over and over again is that someone else has developed cancer, or has recently battled one of the higher risk forms of cancer associated with PFAS foams. This is sad, but it’s not a problem that is only affecting retired “old” firefighters. Today, a Duluth Fire Department Captain is battling prostate cancer, one of several specific types of cancer linked to AFFF/PFAS foam exposure, and we do not know if he will ever be able to return to duty, or possibly be looking at an even more tragic outcome.

You might be wondering how often are PFAS foams still being used in the MN fire service today? When a fire department uses a PFAS foam, they are required to report the use to the State Fire Marshal’s Division. Data provided to me from the State Fire Marshal’s staff reported 246 fire department response incidents using PFAS foams from June 30, 2020 through January 29, 2022. This is a statewide issue with reporting from a landfill in northern St. Louis County, to a structure fire in Rochester, to a semi-truck fire in St. Paul, to a farm equipment fire in Olivia, to an unintentional release at the airport. This is truly a problem for cities large and small, with career and volunteer departments, outstate and metro.

Ironically, another source of PFAS chemical exposure to firefighters is the personal protective equipment, or PPE, that we wear to protect ourselves while fighting a fire. Commonly known as turnout gear, this protective clothing uses PFAS chemicals in manufacturing parts of the moisture barrier and thermal liner. Recent studies have shown increases in blood serum levels of PFOA measured six hours post dermal exposure demonstrating that skin is likely a significant route of exposure. This proposed legislation is important as we work with turnout gear manufactures to replace legacy turnout gear manufacturing as new PFAS-free technologies become available. I have talked to several sales representatives who claim that there is still debate as to how dangerous PFAS absorption is as it relates to increased exposure and cancer risk. We’re now being told to wear our turnout gear less often, or for shorter periods of time to try to lessen exposure to these dangerous toxins. Is that really an answer for firefighters? Wear dangerous gear for less amounts of time? We know that we signed up for. We understand the risks we take to save lives, but being exposed to cancer causing materials in the gear that is meant to protect us is a risk that we should not have to face. We are asking you to support this legislation restricting the use and manufacturing of these types fluorinated cancer causing and environmentally destructive chemicals.

Without this legislation, firefighters will continue to hear that “we are working on it” for years if not decades to come. Supporting this legislation will ensure action.