

## OPERATIONS EMERGENCY

### CLEANING TURNOUTS

Preliminary exposure reduction (PER) happens at the fire scene first. Turnouts should then be cleaned after each exposure to toxic products of combustion. Exposures can be from car fires, dumpster fires, structure fires and training burns. Accumulation of soot and chemicals on turnouts can lead to persistent exposures of carcinogens to fire fighters. Structural turnouts, including gloves, helmet, hood, boots, pants and coat, should be cleaned according to manufacturer's recommendation and NFPA 1851.

### IAFF PFAS and Fire fighter Turnout Gear

The International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) and Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association (Metro Chiefs) have come together to notify members of the adverse health risks from fire fighter turnout gear. Recent studies have shown that all three layers of fire fighter turnout gear contain per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), a class of fluorinated chemicals known as "forever chemicals" that have been linked to cancer and other serious health effects. These studies highlight the risks associated with the materials and finishes used in turnout gear even before it is exposed to its first fire.

The IAFF and Metro Chiefs share a commitment to eliminating PFAS chemicals from turnout gear. They are working together to engage with regulatory bodies and are in ongoing conversations with manufacturers. Meanwhile, they urge fire fighters to minimize exposure to PFAS in turnout gear by taking the following precautions:

- Turnout gear should NOT be taken into firehouse living areas.
- When transporting gear in a personal vehicle, it should be in a sealed container or bag and preferably NOT transported in the passenger compartment.
- Apparatus cabs should be cleaned regularly and after every fire.
- Wash your hands after handling turnout gear.
- Legacy turnout gear should be replaced as new PFAS-free technologies become available.
- Do not wear turnout gear on responses where this level of protection is not necessary.

- 66% of the firefighters reported not always reporting hazards on the job.
- About one-third of firefighters reported experiencing coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, and/or chest tightness shortly after fire suppression, overhaul, or live fire training.
- Firefighters reported not always using SCBA when exposed— 12% during fire suppression, 25% during live fire training, and 38% during overhaul.
- 9% reported not always following the Incident Chain of Command (ICC) during emergency response.

Source: Washington Firefighter Survey  
2018 Safety and Health Assessment and Research  
for Prevention (SHARP) Program  
Washington State Department of Labor and Industries

### CLEANING SCBA

SCBA gear washers are crucial for maintaining the health and safety of fire fighters and have become a best practice to provide thorough cleaning. Hazardous environments can contaminate SCBA with chemicals, toxins and particulate matter. Regular cleaning and decontamination can reduce the risk of exposure to fire fighters. Proper maintenance of the gear also can extend its lifespan and ensure it functions properly. Compliance with regulations is also important, as regulations dictate proper cleaning and maintenance for SCBA.



**ABOVE:** Bagging up contaminated turnouts and SCBAs prevents cross-contamination.