

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 3, 2019

The Honorable Robert R. Redfield, M.D.
Director
Center for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road SE
Atlanta, GA 30329

The Honorable Patrick Breysse, Ph.D., CIH
Director
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease
Registry
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road SE
Atlanta GA, 30333

Dear Director Redfield and Director Breysse:

We write to express our concern about the limited scope of the national multi-site study on per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). In accordance with section 315 of the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), the Center for Disease Control (CDC) has been authorized to research and study the human health implications of PFAS exposure through the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). In recent months, it has come to our attention that an upcoming study will not investigate health impacts on civilian and military firefighters—a group that may be particularly at-risk due to occupational exposure.¹

The potential adverse health effects that result from PFAS exposure are not currently well understood. PFAS chemicals are used in many products, such as: stain resistant coatings for carpets, upholstery and other fabrics, paints, varnishes, cleaning products and cookware.² PFAS chemicals are also a byproduct of aqueous film-forming foam (AFFF), a highly efficient fire suppressant, commonly used during firefighting training exercises. In the existing research, human exposure to PFAS chemicals has been linked to thyroid diseases, immunological illness, hormone issues, fertility issues, as well as a negative impact on growth, learning, and behavior.³ The EPA has also weighed in, warning that PFAS chemicals are possibly carcinogenic to humans.⁴ For firefighters, this means that they may be at greater risk of developing PFAS-linked health issues due to workplace exposures.

Section 315 of the 2019 NDAA authorizes the ATSDR to commence a study on the human health implications of PFAS contamination not only in drinking and ground water, but also in “relevant exposure pathways including the cumulative health implications of multiple types of PFAS contamination at levels above and below health advisory levels.” Due to the lack of information on the human health effects of PFAS, particularly for those who have been subjected

¹ Senators Jeanne Shaheen and Lisa Murkowski: *Shaheen, Murkowski Lead Bipartisan Letter Urging CDC and ATSDR to Prioritize Studies on Health Effects of Firefighters' Exposure to PFAS* (December 13, 2018).

² Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry Website, PFAS Health Effects Page (<https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfas/pfas-health-effects.html>) (accessed Dec. 17, 2018).

³ *Id.*

⁴ Environmental Protection Agency, Basic Information of PFAS (<https://www.epa.gov/pfas/basic-information-pfas>) (accessed Dec. 17, 2018).

PFAS contamination at levels above and below health advisory levels.” Due to the lack of information on the human health effects of PFAS, particularly for those who have been subjected to higher risk of exposure, like firefighters, we believe it is imperative that ATSDR investigates the effects PFAS may have on civilian and military firefighters. As you may know, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is already conducting a multi-year study on firefighter health risks. We believe that ATSDR’s work can be used, in addition to the NIOSH research, to help industry professionals become more knowledgeable about PFAS health effects.

Firefighters risk their lives to protect and assist those in need. We must protect them by learning as much as we can about the health effects of PFAS exposure in order to ensure that our firefighters are able to do their jobs as safely as possible.

We thank you for your consideration of this matter and we welcome the opportunity to further discuss.

Sincerely,



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress




Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress



Rick Larsen
Member of Congress



Daniel T. Kildee
Member of Congress



Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress