



SB420: Public Safety - Fire Fighting Foam and PFAS Chemicals
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
February 11, 2020
Emily Scarr, Maryland PIRG Director

FAVORABLE (as amended by sponsor)

Maryland PIRG, Earth Forum Howard County, the Unitarian University Legislative Ministry of Maryland, and the Maryland Legislative Coalition request a favorable report on SB420.

*Maryland PIRG is a statewide, non-partisan, non-profit, citizen-funded public interest advocacy organization with grassroots members across the state. For forty years we've stood up to powerful interests whenever they threaten our health and safety, our financial security, or our right to fully participate in our democratic society. **This includes a long history of protecting Marylanders from exposure to toxic chemicals in drinking water and consumer products.***

We support SB420 to restrict the use of firefighting foam containing PFAS for training purposes and to conduct a study on the use of PFAS in food packaging.

Marylanders need access to clean drinking water. Our firefighters shouldn't have to suffer from exposure to toxic chemicals.

Sadly, we may have an uphill battle in front of us to clean up PFAS from our communities and waterways. In order to address the problem, we need to stop new contamination, which this bill can help do.

And, in 2021, we hope this committee will take further action on PFAS. We need to ensure Maryland has the legal framework to hold polluting industry accountable for the pollution they produce and the harm they cause, we need robust water testing to identify the extent of them problem, we need to turn off the tap by restricting the use of PFAS in consumer products and food packaging, and we need to clean up contamination were it exists.

BACKGROUND

PFAS, a class of highly fluorinated chemicals, are industrial chemicals often used as degreasers and waterproofing.¹ The chemical industry is constantly searching for new

¹PFAS—Information on the Maryland Department of the Environment's Efforts to Address PFAS in Maryland's Drinking Water Sources, Maryland Department of the Environment https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/Water/water_supply/Pages/PFAS_Home.aspx

applications. PFAS exposure has been linked to serious illness, including kidney and thyroid disease, pregnancy complications and cancer. PFAS is called the “forever chemical” because, similarly to lead, it is highly persistent in the environment and bioaccumulates in our bodies.

Seemingly every week we are hearing about more communities across the country who have been exposed to PFAS in their drinking water - they may live near a military base, or downstream from a DuPont or 3M chemical plant. In Maryland, we know there is contamination in drinking water and near many military bases, including right here in Annapolis.²

As explained in the Bay Journal this summer, “In the six-state Chesapeake Bay watershed, there are at least 18 sites where PFAS have been detected. That could mean that relatively few industrial facilities in the region have made or used PFAS — or it may mean that no one’s looked very hard.”³

And yet, PFAS are still widespread in both production and use. We see them not only in the firefighting foams, but everywhere from pizza boxes to car seats. Safeguarding against PFAS chemicals as a class is the best way to protect human health. Trying to regulate one chemical at a time will only leave us in an endless game of whack-a-mole.

WHY FIREFIGHTING FOAM?

In particular, the use of firefighting foams containing PFAS for training, or any purpose, makes little sense. PFAS foam puts our water at risk. It also endangers our firefighters, who are at increased cancer risk due to exposure to PFAS and other carcinogenic chemicals like flame retardants. **In fact, cancer is the leading cause of death among firefighters in the United States**, according to the Firefighter Cancer Support Network and the International Association of Fire Fighters

Further, there are already safer alternatives to PFAS foam on the market, and many states as well as the EU are already moving away from using PFAS fire fighting foam completely.

- In the last two years, Washington, Colorado and New Hampshire have passed bans on PFAS in firefighting foams in their states.
- Both the military and the FAA have been directed by Congress to stop using PFAS-based firefighting foams.
- In addition to Maryland states considering legislation addressing PFAS in firefighting foam include: AK, CA, CT, IA, IL, ME, MI, NC, VT, WA, WI.

We urge a favorable report.

² Environmental Working Group map of PFAS Contamination, https://www.ewg.org/interactive-maps/2019_pfas_contamination/map/

³ Chesapeake states grapple with ‘forever chemical’ contaminating drinking water, Bay Journal, July 15, 2019, https://www.bayjournal.com/article/watershed_states_grapple_with_forever_chemical_contaminating_drinking_water