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ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Friend Or Foe: Is Your Firefighting Gear Protecting Or Killing You?

For years, firefighters have relied on their protective gear to keep them safe while risking their lives for their communities. Articles published by Bloomberg and The New York Times highlight a growing concern: the same gear firefighters use to keep them safe has harmful “forever chemicals” that are known to cause ulcerative colitis, testicular cancer, kidney cancer, and prostate cancer, among other diseases.

In this ebook, we will detail what these harmful chemicals are, where they are usually found, and what to do if you are a firefighter and have been recently diagnosed with cancer.



What Are PFAS?

PFAS stands for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, a group of human-made chemicals that first hit the market as coatings for Teflon pans in the 1950s and are now found in products like microwave popcorn bags, pizza boxes, carpets, and cosmetics.

PFAS include thousands of compounds, including PFOA, PFOS, and GenX. They are known for their stability and water and heat resistance, thus making them ideal for firefighter gear. Currently, the only personal protective equipment rated for firefighter safety uses PFAS.



Where Are These Found & Why Are These Harmful?

PFAS are included in a group of man-made chemicals referred to as “forever chemicals”. These chemicals have incredibly long half-lives and don’t break down in the environment, making them incredibly useful in a variety of industries.

Due to their durability and resistance to water and heat, PFAS are commonly used in fire suppression foam, as well as in the water-resistant outer layer and the inner moisture barrier of firefighters’ “bunker gear”. PFAS can also be found in:

- Teflon and other brands of nonstick cookware;
- Paper and cardboard wrapper coatings for fast food and bakery goods;
- Stain-resistant furniture, carpets, and other fabric treatments;
- Clothes labeled stain- or water-repellent, such as jackets and other garments;
- Personal care products and cosmetics; and
- Tap water.



This durability comes with a cost: these chemicals build up in the body rather than break down, causing toxic levels to stay in the human body long after exposure. PFAS can be absorbed into the skin through sweat, which presents a unique threat to firefighters using equipment made with PFAs. Despite firefighter turnout gear including a thermal base layer to protect the skin from the water-resistant outer layer and the inner moisture barrier, this base layer can quickly become saturated with sweat, allowing PFAS to absorb through the skin.

Lawsuits have already been filed against a number of firefighter gear manufacturers and chemical companies that provide various materials. The firefighter plaintiffs in these cases have alleged they developed various forms of cancer as a result of PFAS exposure, including but not limited to:

- ulcerative colitis;
- kidney cancer;
- testicular cancer;
- pancreatic cancer;
- bladder cancer;
- prostate cancer;
- liver cancer;
- leukemia; and
- Lymphoma.

If you were diagnosed with any of the above forms of cancer and are currently working or have worked as a firefighter, you could be entitled to financial compensation.





What Compensation Can Firefighters Seek Due to Toxic PFAS Exposure?

In any product liability case, the plaintiff is entitled to seek monetary damages, which reflect their economic and non-economic losses caused by the defendant's negligent conduct. Sullivan & Galleshaw, LLP will evaluate, at no cost to you, whether PFAS exposure from your firefighting gear caused your injuries. If so, you may be entitled to recover:

- **Medical Bills** – This includes the cost of any treatments related to your cancer or other PFAS-related health condition, such as hospital bills, prescription medications, and even expected future expenses.
- **Loss of Income** – If cancer has left you unable to work or limited your potential for earning income in the future, you may seek damages for these losses as well.
- **Non-Economic Damages** – Cancer causes more than quantifiable financial losses; it also creates a significant amount of pain and suffering, as well as other forms of emotional distress and an overall loss of enjoyment of life. Non-economic damages are designed to compensate for these losses, which are by definition intangible.



Contact Sullivan & Galleshaw Today to Schedule a Free Consultation

Every day, we learn about more cases of firefighters—and others exposed to PFAS chemicals—who have developed cancer and other serious health ailments. If you suspect PFAS exposure is the root cause of your own condition, speak with an attorney at Sullivan & Galleshaw, LLP right away!

The team at Sullivan & Galleshaw, LLP, can review your case and help you decide whether legal action is necessary and warranted to obtain financial compensation for your injuries. Call us today at **(718) 521-2941** or visit <https://help.sullivangalleshaw.com/fb> to schedule a free, no-risk consultation.