



January 30, 2025

Oregon State Legislature
House Committee On Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for HCR 2 - Declaring a commitment to the health and safety of firefighters and to finding an urgent solution to the problem of firefighting personal protective gear that contains cancer-causing chemicals.

Dear Chair Tran, Vice Chairs Grayber and Lewis, and members of the committee,

On behalf of the more than 55,000 members and supporters of Sierra Club Oregon, we write in support of HCR 2 - Declaring a commitment to the health and safety of firefighters and to finding an urgent solution to the problem of firefighting personal protective gear that contains cancer-causing chemicals.

HCR 2 states:

“Be it Resolved, That as soon as suitable non-PFAS firefighting personal protective gear is available, the Legislative Assembly will enact legislation banning the future use of PFAS in personal protective gear and ensuring that personal protective gear containing PFAS is quickly replaced throughout this state.”

Protecting the firefighters who risk their lives to protect our communities should be prioritized. A 2020 study published in *Environmental Science & Technology Letters* found that significant quantities of fluorochemicals are shed from firefighting protective gear during its in-service lifetime. Specifically, side-chain fluoropolymers in the gear lead directly to PFOA precursor materials in the environment, exposing both firefighters and those in close proximity to harmful toxins.¹

Growing awareness of this issue has inspired action across the country such as a documentary titled *Burned* about the suspicion of “forever chemicals” in firefighter turnout gear leading to cancer in firefighters.² And in 2024, Massachusetts passed a law to phase out PFAS in firefighting gear.³ Oregon’s commitment will support the work of others seeking effective solutions for making the lives of firefighters safer. Supporting HCR 2 means Oregon will take an important step in safeguarding firefighter health and advancing the transition to protective gear free of PFAS chemicals. Firefighter organizations, such as the International Association of Fire Fighters (“IAFF”), have been collaborating with scientists, advocacy groups, and decision makers to address the dangers of toxic substances in safety equipment. In collaboration with the American Cancer Society, the IAFF has brought on its first Chief Medical Officer to further research on cancer risks among firefighters. Both the IAFF and Metro Chiefs are prioritizing

¹ Another Pathway for Firefighter Exposure to Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances: Firefighter Textiles

Graham F. Peaslee et. al., *Environmental Science & Technology Letters* 2020 7 (8), 594-599 DOI: 10.1021/acs.estlett.0c00410

² <https://www.iaff.org/news/burned-now-available-for-public-viewings/>

³ <https://www.boston.com/news/local-news/2024/08/15/healey-signs-law-phasing-out-toxic-pfas-in-firefighters-gear/>

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eliminating PFAS from turnout gear, working closely with manufacturers and regulatory agencies to drive meaningful change. ⁴

We urge the Oregon Legislature to take this necessary step toward protecting our firefighters from unnecessary exposure to toxic chemicals. Supporting HCR-2 will strengthen efforts to create safer protective gear and reinforce Oregon's leadership in prioritizing firefighter health and safety. Please join us in supporting HCR-2.

Respectfully submitted,

Emily Bowes, Policy Strategist

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emily Bowes". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

⁴ <https://www.iaff.org/pfas/pfas-advisory/>