



---

# A STRONG VOICE FOR OREGON'S WORKERS

---

TO: Chair Tran  
Vice-chairs Grayber and Lewis  
Members of the Veterans, Emergency Management committee  
FR: Catie Theisen, Oregon AFL-CIO  
RE: HCR 2 Support

January 30, 2025

The Oregon AFL-CIO represents 300,000 workers across Oregon and is a voice for all workers in the legislative process. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HCR 2.

The presence of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in firefighting turnout gear poses significant health risks to firefighters, despite their intended purpose of providing enhanced protection. PFAS, often referred to as “forever chemicals,” are associated with a wide range of adverse health effects, including cancer, immune system suppression, hormonal disruption, and developmental issues. Studies have shown that prolonged exposure to PFAS increases the likelihood of developing cancers such as kidney, testicular, and prostate cancer—ailments that disproportionately affect firefighters.

PFAS can leach from the fabric of the gear over time, contaminating the firefighter’s skin, clothing, and environment. One of the primary ways PFAS enter the body is through dermal absorption. During firefighting operations, elevated temperatures and heavy perspiration can enhance the absorption of these chemicals through the skin. Additionally, PFAS can degrade into fine particles or dust that firefighters unknowingly inhale or ingest. Once absorbed, PFAS accumulate and remain in the bloodstream for years, as the body has limited mechanisms to eliminate them.

Efforts to address these dangers are underway, with some manufacturers exploring alternatives to PFAS in turnout gear. However, the transition has been slow due to the complexity and cost of developing equally effective materials. In the meantime, firefighters are left with limited options for safer gear, forcing them to choose between immediate protection from fire hazards and long-term health risks posed by their equipment.

The accumulation of PFAS in the body, combined with their long-term persistence and links to severe diseases, demand urgent action. Transitioning to PFAS-free materials and implementing stricter safety protocols are essential steps toward protecting firefighters from the hidden dangers of their protective gear. We ask that you support HCR-2.