



29 April, 2019

IPEN Intervention on PFAS

Given by Mick Tisbury, United Firefighters Union of Australia, New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union, and the International Association of Firefighters

My name is Mick Tisbury and I am speaking today on behalf of the United Firefighters Union of Australia, the New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union and the International Association of Firefighters represented here today by Pat Morrison.

Together we represent 1/2 million fire fighters

Firefighters through their occupation forgo quality and quantity of life in their dedication to protecting the community, due to their exposures to toxic chemicals released on the fire ground. These exposures are unavoidable, however PFAS exposure via foam concentrate is avoidable.

Firefighters are one of the most exposed workers to PFAS chemicals and are deeply concerned about the connections between PFAS exposures and those cancers associated with firefighting profession.

Cancer in the fire service is the largest health related issue facing the firefighting profession. IAFF is conducting several studies now to identify pathways of exposures to toxic chemicals including PFAS. In Australia PFAS Blood testing has shown elevated levels in firefighters blood serum.

In 2007 the Australian Fire Services started to transition to fluorine free foam because of firefighter health concerns. And now every Australian commercial airport and every Australian Fire Service now use only fluorine free foam. As a consequence, where I work, every chemical fire in Victoria has been successfully and quickly extinguished with fluorine free foam, including several major chemical fires within the last 12 months.

Movement away from PFOA-laced firefighting foam has not yet occurred in the US and firefighters are deeply concerned about their exposures. Information from recent studies indicate elevated levels of PFAS chemicals in blood specimens collected from firefighters post fire.

UFUA, IAFF and NZPFU are strongly recommending that delegates to the Stockholm Convention COP 9 place PFOA, a main ingredient in firefighting foam, in Annex A with no exemptions.

Use of short-chain PFAS as alternatives to PFOA are not a suitable option from an environmental and continued human health risk point of view.

Due to the costly, highly polluting nature of PFAS-containing firefighting foams and the availability of effective fluorine-free foams, no exemption should be granted.