



CCM: Towns Need State, Business Dollars To Clean Up Firefighting Foam

by Jack Kramer | Mar 4, 2020

NEW HAVEN, CT – Towns need far greater partnership, and money, from the state and business community to battle environmental fallout from firefighting foam leaching into municipal aquifers and public water supplies, according to Connecticut’s largest lobbying organization for municipalities.

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) Tuesday said that it is thankful that Gov. Ned Lamont’s proposed state budget includes \$2 million in new funding to help towns replace their chemical firefighting foam, which contains per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS.

But CCM said money from the state and responsible businesses will be needed as towns across the state now face immense potential environmental liability as the long-used (but no longer used) firefighting foam has leached into the water table and migrated into public water supplies, possibly contaminating some municipal water beyond acceptable levels.

“If the state and responsible businesses do not step up to help towns pay for the necessary level of remediation, the bill handed directly to property taxpayers could be very significant and public water supplies could be compromised,” said Joseph DeLong, CCM’s chief executive officer.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), exposure to PFAS over certain levels may result in adverse health effects, including developmental problems for fetuses during pregnancy or for breastfed infants, as well as cancer and possible damage to the liver, immunological systems, thyroid, and other areas.

PFAS can enter the bloodstream through food, drinking water, and the biodegradation of products that contain these chemicals. And once they are in, they are there forever, earning them the name “forever chemicals.”

PFAS entered the municipal realm as they were also used to make Aqueous Film-Forming Foams (AFFF). Many municipal fire departments currently have stocks of AFFF, and a new state action plan discusses the need for “financial assistance for the establishment of a take-back program to safely dispose of AFFF and thereby prevent future releases.”

In 2019, Lamont created the Connecticut Interagency PFAS Task Force to handle the problems created by the chemicals leaching into watersheds.

The task force’s final action plan recommends testing public drinking water, setting a maximum contaminant level, identifying and evaluating sources of human exposure, minimizing occupational exposure, establishing limits for PFAS in consumer products, standards for cleanup, and developing a GIS database that identifies and establishes a public outreach team.

The foams have become a staple for municipal fire departments because it is effective against gasoline, oil, and other chemical fires. While training with AFFF foam should be avoided, doing so also increases the chances of spreading the chemical.

The foam can be sprayed over large areas and, as such, help to curtail the spread of a burning liquid like gasoline.

According to the U.S. Department of Defense, they use the foam because “on ships and on aircraft, the close proximity of people, fuel, and munitions can be especially dangerous. AFFF works by quickly spreading out over the surface of the fuel, depriving the fire of oxygen, quickly extinguishing even large fires.”

Created by corporations such as 3M and DuPont, PFAS have been used in everything from food packaging to carpets to clothing to make things durable and non-stick. Teflon is an inert Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOA), a subset of PFAS.

PFAS were once thought to be safe and heralded as the wave of the future. Every household had a non-stick pan and fire departments around the country were using AFFF to control fires. But now that the harmful effects of the

chemicals are known, the question is how much is harmful and who is going to pay for the remediation.

Attorney Paul J. Napoli of the law firm Napoli Shkolnik, and Walter Hang, president of Toxics Targeting, spoke in detail to municipal leaders recently about the issue and raised the legal argument that manufacturers, such as 3M and Dupont, should pay significant damages to the towns to help them with the environmental remediation that is necessary now and in the future.

Here are some of the examples they presented of lawsuit settlements and costs budgeted by state governments:

- *Michigan is spending \$23.2 million for costs associated with PFAS contamination, including testing, monitoring, and technical assistance at more than a dozen sites across the state;*
- *In New York, \$10 million was budget to cover the cost of installing a temporary municipal filtration system and hundreds of private well filtration systems while working to identify an alternate, permanent drinking water source in Hoosick Falls. Gov. Andrew Cuomo also announced that \$350 million would be available for water system upgrades statewide for PFAS;*
- *In Massachusetts, Barnstable County paid \$2.95 million to clean up contaminated wells in the Town of Barnstable, and the City of Westfield approved \$13 million in bonds to address water contamination;*
- *New Hampshire taxpayers have shouldered the burden of nearly \$14 million to clean up PFAS from a Superfund site owned by Coakley Landfill Group. As of 2017, New Hampshire had already spent roughly \$30 million on PFAS remediation projects;*
- *PFAS contamination at Cape Fear, North Carolina has cost \$1.8 million to date, with an additional \$650,000 for legal fees and water quality testing.*

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