

From: **"Mochrie, Paul"**  
To: **"Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"**  
Date: 3/6/2024 6:07:07 PM  
Subject: Firefighter cancer risk reduction - turnout gear replacement

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Good afternoon Mayor and Council,

I am writing to provide an update on an important step we are taking to mitigate the risk of occupational cancer faced by members of Vancouver Fire Rescue Services.

***Background – Firefighter exposure to Per-and-Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)***

As you are likely aware, occupational cancer is currently the leading cause of line-of-duty deaths in the fire service. The World Health Organization (WHO) has classified fire fighter occupational exposure as a Group 1 carcinogen, stating there is sufficient evidence for cancer in humans. Since 2017, 34 current and former members of VFRS have died as a result of cancer that was presumptively determined to have been caused by their work serving our City.

A key contributor to the increased incidence of cancer for firefighters is exposure to Per-and-Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS), commonly known as "forever chemicals". PFAS are also linked to the other adverse health effects, including impacts on the reproductive system.

Of note, PFAS chemicals are used as a water/oil repellent coating in the moisture barrier that comprises a component of the turnout gear used by firefighters across North America, including here in Vancouver. Given skin contact with PFAS in the moisture barrier component of their gear, firefighters are subject to exposure through daily use and in periods of extreme heat conditions combined with high physical exertion. Studies have linked the absorption of PFAS chemicals from turnout gear to cancer risk and other health complications for firefighters.

***Replacement of VFRS Gear with PFAS Free Product***

In late 2023, a Non-Fluorinated (PFAS Free) Moisture Barrier passed rigorous NPFA testing and was certified by NFPA for use in structural firefighting.

Through the City of Vancouver's current vendor for turnout gear, we now have the opportunity to acquire this new PFAS-free moisture barrier. In consultation with Karen Fry and Patrice, and in the aim of facilitating an immediate purchase order and securing prioritized access from our vendor (presently the only company offering a PSAF-free option certified by NFPA), I have authorized an adjustment of \$750,000 to the 2024 operating budget for VFRS. This adjustment is commensurate with my approval limit under the Operating Budget policy. Chief Fry anticipates that these funds will support an initial purchase order for approximately 187 sets which will supply 20% of the workforce.

In the near term, we will also present a report to Council recommending approval of the investment required to replace the remainder of the department's turnout gear. We recognize that this particular issue is of fundamental concern for the Mayor and members of Council and there is strong commitment to ensure we are taking steps to mitigate the hazards faced by firefighters and other City staff on the job.

With this initial purchased order, we understand the vendor will commit to prioritizing the production and delivery of turnout gear for us with an estimated turnaround time of 7-8 months. We also understand this order will make VFRS the first fire department in North America to provide staff with PFAS-free bunker gear.

If you have any questions regarding this matter in advance of the forthcoming Council report, please do not hesitate to contact me or Chief Fry.

Best,  
Paul

**Paul Mochrie** (he/him)  
City Manager  
City of Vancouver



The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliwətał (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.