

Protecting the Protectors: New Program Detects PFAS in Firefighters' Gear

PFAS is a threat to firefighters' health. Forever Analytical has launched a new screening program for firefighters, gear + textile manufacturers to detect PFAS.

SOUTH BEND, IN, UNITED STATES, February 24, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In 2014, one month after being promoted to lieutenant, firefighter Paul Cotter of the Worchester Fire Department (Mass.) was diagnosed with prostate cancer. A month later, the otherwise fit 55-year-old was fighting for his life.

His wife Diane had a hunch his cancer was connected to his turnout gear, the water- and oil-proof jacket and pants

designed to protect firefighters from harm. Cotter, who says she barely graduated high school, threw herself into a decade-long search for answers and uncovered the possible cause: PFAS, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances commonly used in turnout gear at that time. In 2017, her efforts led to Graham Peaslee, a University of Notre Dame researcher, and now chief scientific officer of Forever Analytical, who agreed to help.

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It's no longer business as usual for fire departments and safety gear and textile manufacturers. With more states regulating and even banning PFAS, they need Forever Analytical to screen for PFAS.”

Hunter MacMillan



Forever Analytical is protecting the protectors with PFAS screening services.

Peaslee screened the turnout gear supplied by Cotter and was shocked by the staggering levels of PFAS he found. This led to a second larger study funded by the Last Call Foundation. Ultimately, the harm being done to firefighters inspired the founding of Forever Analytical, a startup company whose technology detects the presence of total fluorine in virtually any liquid or solid material or product. Today, Forever Analytical announced a new screening program dedicated to protecting the firefighters from PFAS.

Forever Analytical CEO Hunter MacMillan explains that the PFAS screening program is inspired by firefighters like Paul Cotter, who unknowingly sacrificed their health to protect their communities. But it is also driven by mounting regulatory pressure across the United States and the European Union to restrict the intentional use of PFAS in firefighters' turnout gear.

"It's no longer business as usual for fire departments and gear manufacturers," MacMillan says. "California, Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island have all passed legislation prohibiting the manufacture, sale, and distribution of firefighting gear containing intentionally added PFAS. More states are considering such bans. At the federal level, the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) helped reintroduce the PFAS Alternatives Act to fund the development of PFAS free turnout gear nationwide."

He adds, "The missing component is compliance. PFAS are not visible to the naked and are odor free so how do you know if PFAS are in gear or gear components without proper screening by an independent test lab that screens for total fluorine (PFAS) and not just a subset of PFAS. That's where Forever Analytical comes in with a program dedicated to the firefighting industry that is simple to implement and detects the presence of total fluorine quickly and affordably."

[Forever Analytical's program has two options, the first for end users](#), firefighters and fire departments; and the second for gear manufacturers and their suppliers called FluoroZero™. Both screen for total PFAS and Brominated Flame Retardants (BRFs). Firefighting professionals can access screening services on an as needed basis for new and in-use turnout gear. Gear manufacturers and their suppliers are encouraged to enroll in the FluoroZero™ program that includes ongoing screening to ensure regulatory compliance and discovery of unintentional PFAS.

[Forever Analytical's technology is unique among PFAS testing laboratories](#) and others offering PFAS screening services. It is the only company using particle induced gamma ray emission (PIGE) spectroscopy to screen for and detect total fluorine (PFAS) contamination. It measures total fluorine in firefighter gear to determine whether PFAS were intentionally incorporated into materials or present only at trace levels due to secondary contamination. Materials with no detectable fluorine can be designated as PFAS-free under the company's testing criteria.

Diane Cotter, whose retired firefighter husband Paul is now cancer free, is excited about the impact Forever Analytical's screening program will have on the firefighting community. "We paid dearly for not keeping up with the threat posed by PFAS. It is great to see the entire industry - fire departments, unions and gear manufacturers - coming on board to test."

Tom Bowes, president of Quincy Firefighters Local 792 and a 25-year firefighting veteran, is equally grateful as new gear sold as PFAS free was anything but. "I was under the assumption we had nothing to worry about, and our new gear tested positive for PFAS. Had it not been for Forever Analytical, we never would have known."

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