

# STOP INCINERATION OF TOXIC PFAS CHEMICALS

## ACTION NEEDED: Amend



Sauget Incinerator

## LEGISLATION SUMMARY:

**Prohibit incinerators from burning highly toxic PFAS (per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances).**

### OVERVIEW:

- » Burning PFAS is a mistake! The chemicals are not fully broken down in an incinerator, and instead **harmful chemicals pollute nearby air, water and soil.**
- » People living in the East Metro area have **already been impacted by years of pollution** from the Sauget incinerator and should not be exposed to more harm.
- » United Congregations Metro East and Sierra Club Illinois want **PFAS wastes to be safely stored** until advanced technologies are developed to destroy it.
- » HB4818 needs amending to **define PFAS the same as other state bills** to cover 5,000 hazardous chemicals not just 200.
- » Another amendment is needed to prevent the USEPA from potentially overriding Illinois law.

PHOTO BY JACOB BARKER, STL TODAY

## BACKGROUND:

### Toxic Forever Chemicals Pollute Air and Water

PFAS are “forever chemicals” that don’t readily break down in the environment and can pollute the water we drink and the air we breathe. PFAS are among the strongest of any engineered chemicals ever invented and are highly resistant to destruction. Firefighters have used special foams made from PFAS to extinguish high-temperature petroleum fires. Safer alternatives are now available.

In 2016, the Department of Defense (DOD) spent millions of dollars to replace its toxic PFOS-based foams due to evidence they were harmful to people

and the environment.<sup>1</sup> DOD then signed contracts to incinerate these unused foams at hazardous waste incinerators across the country.

### Incinerating PFAS Toxic Waste Not Safe

Existing incinerators designed to treat other common hazardous wastes have not been shown to eliminate PFAS.<sup>2,3</sup> Instead, incomplete incineration could potentially emit PFAS, potent greenhouse gases or acutely toxic gases into the atmosphere which fallout onto nearby communities.<sup>4</sup>

Scientists at the DOD and USEPA have raised several concerns about PFAS incineration, including the type of potential breakdown products formed.<sup>5</sup> Both agencies have called for additional research

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into alternate disposal technologies.<sup>6</sup> EPA suggests people hold their unused PFAS until safer technologies are available to destroy it.

## Illinois Incinerators Would Endanger Local Residents

Sierra Club and United Congregations Metro East, joined other frontline communities to sue DoD to stop its incineration contracts.<sup>7</sup> New York has banned PFAS incineration, and we cannot let this material be sent to Illinois!

While communities across the country are threatened by PFAS and other hazardous chemicals from incinerations, the areas closest to hazardous waste incinerators face some of the greatest risks. In the United States, waste incinerators are disproportionately located in lower income and communities of color. The facilities that received

AFFF have a long history of compliance violations and substandard environmental performance.

## Support Needed for HB4818 Amendments

During 2021, a PFAS incineration ban bill, HB3190, was passed by both chambers but vetoed by the Governor, who supported the bill's intent but had concerns about inadvertent consequences. Subsequent negotiations by IEPA, the Governor's Office, the Sierra Club and the United Congregations of Metro East devised acceptable language. As introduced, HB4818 gives USEPA too much control over Illinois law by defining PFAS to cover only 200 hazardous chemicals instead of the 5,000 covered by other Illinois laws, and by allowing USEPA to potentially override Illinois law in the future.

## References

- 1 U.S. Air Force, 2016, AF awards replacement firefighting foam contract, <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/915057/af-awards-replacement-firefighting-foam-contract/>
- 2 Horst, 2020. Understanding and Managing the Potential By-Products of PFAS Destruction. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwmr.12372>
- 3 SBIR-STIR funding, AFFF disposal, <https://www.sbir.gov/sbirsearch/detail/1254657>
- 4 Lundin, 2017, Destruction of Persistent Organic Compounds in Combustion Systems. Norway Umea University <https://www.divaportal.org/smash/get/diva2:1155115/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- 5 EPA, 2019, PFAS Air Emission Measurements: Activities and Research [https://cfpub.epa.gov/si/si\\_public\\_file\\_download.cfm?p\\_download\\_id=538634&Lab=NRML](https://cfpub.epa.gov/si/si_public_file_download.cfm?p_download_id=538634&Lab=NRML)
- 6 Strategic Environmental Research and Development Program, FY 2021: Improved Understanding of Thermal Destruction Technologies for Materials Laden with Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances, <https://www.serdp-estcp.org/index.php//content/download/50016/492599/file/ERSON21-C1%20Thermal%20PFAS.pdf>
- 7 Earthjustice, 2020, <https://earthjustice.org/news/press/2020/department-of-defense-illegally-burning-stockpiles-of-toxic-forever-chemicals>
- 8 Grandjean, 2013, Immunotoxicity of perfluorinated alkylates: calculation of benchmark doses based on serum concentrations in children. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1476-069X-12-35>

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