



PHOTO BY Jacob Barker, STL Today

Help Stop PFAS Incineration in Illinois

HB 3190 would prohibit the disposal by incineration of toxic PFAS chemicals, including, but not limited to surplus fire fighting foams.

Military and civilian firefighters use Aqueous Film-Forming Foams (AFFF) containing PFAS to extinguish high temperature petroleum fires. In 2016, based on the well-documented toxicity, environmental persistence and risks posed to human health associated with PFAS, the Department of Defense spent millions of dollars to replace its toxic PFOS-based foams.^[1] It then signed contracts to incinerate these stockpiles at hazardous waste incinerators across the country.

Incinerating PFAS is a mistake! The carbon-fluorine bonds in PFAS are among the strongest in any engineered compound and are highly resistant to destruction. Existing incinerators designed to treat other common hazardous wastes have not been shown to eliminate PFAS.^{[2],[3]} Instead, incomplete incineration could potentially emit PFAS, potent greenhouse gases or acutely toxic gases into the atmosphere which fallout onto nearby communities.^[4]

Scientists at the DOD and USEPA have raised several concerns about PFAS incineration, including the impact of incineration conditions on PFAS destruction, the type of potential breakdown products formed, and the absence of analytical methods to measure PFAS and breakdown products in incinerator stack

Sierra Club Illinois
520 East Capitol Ave
Springfield IL 62701
(312) 919-5284

Sierra Club Legislative
50 F St NW, Eighth Floor
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 547-1141

sierraclub.org
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gases.^[5] Both agencies have called for additional research into alternate PFAS disposal technologies and the effects of incineration.^[6]

Sierra Club and United Congregations Metro East, joined other frontline communities to sue DoD to stop its incineration contracts.^[7] Yet despite Congressional requirements to ensure community safety, the military continues to ship their PFAS wastes to incinerators to be burned. New York has banned PFAS incineration, and we cannot let this material be sent to Illinois!

Based on blood tests, the Centers for Disease Control estimates that more than 99% of all US residents have PFAS in their blood. Experts believe these exposures could already be impacting our health, including suppressing the immune system.^[8]

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.

Sierra Club advocates for AFFF and other PFAS wastes to be safely stored until advanced technologies fully certify proper destruction. Help us pass HB 3190 and protect people from harmful PFAS exposures.

Contact Nicole Saulsberry for more information: Nicole.Saulsberry@SierraClub.org

References:

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