

Sen. Cowles: Bill to Prevent PFAS Pollution Passes Senate Committee

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MADISON– Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) released the following statement after the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy recommended 2019 Senate Bill 310 for passage on a vote of 3-2:

“This legislation will reduce the impact that PFAS compounds have on Wisconsin residents and the environment by banning the unconfined use of this firefighting foam unless it’s an emergency where it’s needed to stop dangerous flammable liquid fires. Firefighting foams that contains PFAS are lifesaving products and are developed and tested with good intentions, and the safety of first responders and the community during emergencies should continue to be a priority. However, PFAS contamination of water caused by these foams is causing serious hardship for residents of Northeast Wisconsin and throughout the state, and the number of people we know this pollution is affecting only continues to grow statewide.”

2019 Senate Bill 310 was authored by Senator Cowles and Representative John Nygren (R-Marinette) to address one of the primary sources of per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) pollution. This legislation would ban the use of firefighting foams with intentionally-added PFAS for training as training foams without PFAS can still properly prepare our first responders. SB 310 still allows the use of class B firefighting foam for true emergencies because PFAS-containing foams are the most effective at addressing the dangerous circumstances that can arise from flammable liquid fires on a highway or runway, at a factory, or elsewhere.

“This bill creates the necessary balance between reducing the dangers to human health and negative environmental footprint these chemicals pose

while also preserving the ability of first responders to use an extremely effective tool to fight flammable liquid fires. After months of working on an amendment with the Administration to ensure the proper implementation of this policy, I'm pleased to see this bill pass through committee. I, however, am disappointed that my Democratic colleagues on the Committee are so committed to a flawed policy that they chose to vote against real environmental progress. Looking ahead, I'm hoping we can come together and find common solutions to address this issue that start with restrictions on the use of PFAS firefighting foams."

Senate Bill 310 and its companion, Assembly Bill 323, is supported by a wide array of groups, including the Professional Fire Fighters of Wisconsin and Wisconsin EMS Association, municipal water-industry experts in the Municipal Environmental Group-Water Division and Wisconsin Rural Water Association, the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, the Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin, and business groups including American Chemistry Council, American Petroleum Institute, and Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce.