

Senate approves new limits on use of firefighting foam containing PFAs

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The state Senate voted to place new limits on the use of firefighting foam that contains PFAs over the objections of Dems who said the bill didn't go far enough.

SB 310 cleared on a voice vote. But Sen. Dave Hansen, D-Green Bay, said it doesn't address clean-up costs for his constituents who are worried about contamination in places such as Peshtigo and Marinette. He argued the Senate should be taking up the more comprehensive approach he has proposed along with Sen. Mark Miller, D-Monona.

"This bill, despite the rhetoric, does nothing to help my constituents," Hansen said.

But Sen. Rob Cowles, who co-authored SB 310 and chairs the Natural Resources Committee, said talks are ongoing about additional legislation that would address the issue. He questioned how it made sense to reject SB 310, which he said would prevent future problems, while negotiations continue on a broader approach.

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"This bill in front of us was never meant to be the only bill," said Cowles, R-Green Bay.

Perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances are found in products such as firefighting foam and nonstick cookware. They also have been found in the Marinette and Peshtigo area in soil, sediment, groundwater, surface water, private drinking water wells and biosolids, along with wells in Madison.

SB 310 seeks to prohibit the use or discharge of firefighting foam if PFAS was intentionally added. It includes exemptions for the use of the foam as part of an emergency and for testing if certain requirements were met.

An amendment backed by Hansen and Miller sought to go further by banning the use of firefighting foams except in an emergency, removing the exemption for testing and adding new requirements for the DNR to create grant programs for local governments to address the pollution. It was rejected along party lines.