

Call for Evidence: The risk of firefighters' exposure to contaminants and its impact on their health and wellbeing September 2025

The London Assembly Fire Committee has launched an investigation into the risk of firefighters' exposure to contaminants and its impact on their health and wellbeing. This investigation will explore the risk of firefighters' exposure to contaminants in London and scrutinise the London Fire Brigade (LFB) response and processes in place associated with risks. It will examine:

- The health and wellbeing risks associated with firefighters' exposure to contaminants in different environments in London;
- LFB's approach to risk assessments on firefighters' exposure to contaminants and strategies to mitigate exposure risks;
- What and how should national standards apply to risk assessments of firefighters' exposure to contaminants;
- What LFB is doing to ensure PPE and equipment procured effectively mitigates against risk of contaminant exposure.

Below is information about the investigation and Call for Evidence, as well as key questions the Committee is interested in hearing about.

Who can submit evidence?

This Call for Evidence is open to all who would like to respond. We particularly welcome responses from fire experts, industry bodies, firefighters and representative organisations.

Why is the Committee exploring this topic?

The London Assembly investigates issues of importance to Londoners and is the body that holds the Mayor to account.

Firefighters can be exposed to hazardous contaminants (including so-called 'forever chemicals') as an inherent part of their firefighting duties. Recent research (commissioned by the Fire Brigades Union) has indicated that through this exposure firefighters are at an increased risk of cancer.

In 2023, the International Agency for Research on Cancer reviewed evidence from cancer studies and mechanistic studies in humans and concluded that occupational exposure as a firefighter is carcinogenic to humans (Group 1)¹

As an employer, LFB has duties under health and safety legislation to adequately control exposure to materials in the workplace that causes ill health.² In 2024, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) announced plans to inspect fire and rescue services to assess measures taken to protect firefighters from carcinogens.

Will responses be published?

Yes, in the large majority of circumstances we will publish written submissions and the name of the individual or organisation that submitted it online. This is so that there is transparency about what evidence the Committee has received.

¹ International Agency for Research on Cancer, [Occupational Exposure as a Firefighter](#), July 2023

² [COSHH basics - COSHH](#)

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Exceptions to this are usually applied where there is a legal reason for non-publication or if there is a safeguarding or welfare issue. If there is a reason that you would like your evidence not to be published with your name (submitted anonymously) or to not be published (submitted confidentially), please let us know and the Committee will consider it. However, this cannot be guaranteed, and the Assembly may be required to release non-personally identifiable information if requested under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

What will the evidence I provide be used for?

The responses to this Call for Evidence may be used to inform recommendations to the Mayor, which will likely be in a report. These will be held as open meetings, and anyone is welcome to attend as an audience member to watch the discussion on the [Assembly webcasts page](#).

If information and/or quotations from submissions to this call for evidence are used in this output, we will cite you. We inform those who have submitted evidence about the outcome of the investigation in the form of a link to a report or output when it is published.

Where can I find your privacy notice?

The London Assembly and the GLA are committed to protecting your privacy and personal data when you contact us or submit evidence. You can find the GLA's privacy notice [here](#).

Do I need to answer all the questions?

No, you are welcome to answer the questions that are most relevant to you or your organisations and for which you have the most expertise or experience.

How do I submit evidence?

Please send evidence in a Word document format (not PDF) by email to: scrutiny@london.gov.uk with "Fire Committee firefighters' exposure to contaminants investigation" as the subject title.

The deadline for submission is **31st October 2025**.

Key questions

A. About you/your organisation

- **Organisation name**
- **What does your organisation do?**
- **Where are you based (if applicable)?**

B. Understanding Exposure Risks

- 1) **How well understood are the health risks associated with exposure to contaminants (e.g., carcinogens, particulates, toxic gases) faced by firefighters during operational duties?**
 - a) **What gaps remain in scientific knowledge or monitoring that affect risk assessment and management?**

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- b) Are there unique environmental, operational, or demographic factors in London that influence the nature or level of firefighters' exposure to contaminants compared to other parts of the UK?

C. Risk assessment and reduction strategies

- 2. What should be prioritised in assessing and reducing contaminant exposure risks specifically within LFB?
 - a) What should LFB be doing to mitigate these risks?
 - b) What support do individual firefighters need?
 - c) What can individual firefighters do to reduce risks, and improve health outcomes?
- 3. What barriers are there to providing more effective control of contaminant exposure within the firefighting community in London
- 4. Are there national or international examples that have demonstrably reduced firefighters' exposure to contaminants LFB could learn from?

D. Guidance, standards, and regulation and LFB policies

- 5. How effective are LFB's current PPE standards, decontamination protocols, and post-incident procedures in mitigating exposure risks?
 - a) How could it be improved?
- 6. What improvements or updates are needed in existing industry guidance, health and safety regulations, or national standards to better manage firefighter exposure risks?
 - a) Should there be specific London requirements beyond UK-wide frameworks?
- 7. Are there any other issues, concerns, or recommendations regarding firefighter contaminant exposure that should be brought to the Committee's attention?

About the Committee

The London Assembly consists of 25 elected London Assembly Members, who publicly examine the policies and programmes of the Mayor of London and relevant agencies through committee meetings, plenary sessions, site visits and investigations.

The Fire Committee examines matters relating to the London Fire Commissioner's priorities and objectives. To read more about our previous work, please visit [our website](#).

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Fire Committee Members:

- Zack Polanski AM (Chair)
- Anne Clarke AM (Deputy Chair)
- Léonie Cooper AM
- Susan Hall AM
- Hina Bokhari OBE AM
- Thomas Turrell AM

Contact

Submissions	Scrutiny@london.gov.uk Please send your submissions in a Word document format (not PDF) by 31 st October 2025.
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