

UNIFORMED
FIRE DEPARTMENT, CITY OF NEW YORK
FIRE OFFICERS
LOCAL 854 INTERNATIONAL ASSN. OF FIRE FIGHTERS, AFL-CIO
ASSOCIATION

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August 8, 2004

The Honorable George E. Pataki
Governor of the State of New York
The Executive Chamber, Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Pataki:

The Uniformed Fire Officers Association, which represents 2,500 Lieutenants, Supervising Fire Marshals, Captains, Battalion Chiefs, and Deputy Chiefs, and our parent union, the International Association of Fire Fighters, which represents 267,000 fire fighters throughout the United States and Canada, has long been concerned about the short and long term health hazards posed by exposure to combustion by-products of PVC fires. Dozens of our members have died, and many are still suffering from health effects after being exposed to the byproducts of combustion from the PVC laden, 100 tons of PVC wire sheathing, New York Telephone company fire in 1975.

Fire fighters, like most workers in this country, have little idea about the identity of many of the materials they are potentially exposed to or the hazards of such exposures. Nevertheless, fire fighters continue to respond to the scene and work immediately to save lives and reduce property damage without regard to the potential hazards that may exist. A fire emergency has no controls or occupational safety and health standards to reduce the effect of toxic chemicals. It is an uncontrollable environment that is fought by fire fighters using heavy, bulky and often times inadequate personal protective equipment and clothing. The effect is not only physically demanding but involves exposure to air contaminants, some of which as we have pointed out, are known to cause cancer.



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For this reason, we have continued to address these hazards for fire officers and fire fighters who might be exposed to burning PVC. It is also for this reason that we are writing you to express our concerns and encourage you to support bill S.7577/A.1160.

Because of its majority chlorine content, when PVC burns in fires numerous hazardous substances are formed which present acute and chronic hazards to fire fighters, building occupants and the surrounding community. These are hydrogen chloride gas, benzene, vinyl chloride and dioxin. Hydrogen chloride gas is a corrosive, highly toxic gas that can cause skin burns and when it comes into contact with the mucous lining of the respiratory tract creates hydrochloric acid, which can cause severe respiratory damage. Exposure to a single PVC fire can cause permanent respiratory disease. Dioxin is an unintentional by-product of PVC combustion, and would most likely be left behind in ash and debris from a PVC fire. While only small amounts of dioxin may be formed the result of burning PVC, it is one of the most toxic substances known to science. Dioxin is a known human carcinogen and has been linked to reproductive disorders, immune suppression, endometriosis, and other diseases in laboratory animals. Benzene is firmly established as a human carcinogen. Numerous studies have shown that benzene is a common airborne contaminant in fire smoke and occurs in concentrations that are considered deleterious in the context of chronic exposures.

Similarly, the vinyl chloride monomer from PVC is a well known carcinogen and has been implicated in fire fighter cancers of the brain.

Due to these intrinsic hazards, we support efforts to identify and use alternative building materials that do not pose the risk as does PVC to fire fighters, building occupants or communities.

If you need any additional information or have any question, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Peter L. Gorman
President
Uniformed Fire Officers Association



James J. McGowan
Lieutenants' Representative
Uniformed Fire Officers Association