

Standard turnout gear poses threat to firefighters

Dear Editor,

Firefighters in Pendleton County and beyond risk their lives to protect our communities, but few realize the hidden danger lurking in their very equipment. Woven into the fabric of their turnout gear are per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) — chemicals that have been linked to cancer and other serious health problems. Exposure typically transpires through direct contact with their protective clothing and other contaminated materials they use regularly when responding to emergencies. This only means that this danger is almost inevitable for firefighters. Recognizing this urgent threat, the bipartisan Protecting Firefighters and Advancing State-of-the-Art Alternatives (PFAS Alternatives) Act, introduced by Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick on July 20, 2023, seeks to transition to safer firefighting practices. This legislation will not only prioritize the development of PFAS-free turnout gear but also advance education for first responders, enabling them to un-

derstand the immense danger and how to mitigate their exposure. For Pendleton County, home to approximately 43 firefighters, this legislation is both timely and essential, as they continue to face ongoing exposure risks due to their heavy reliance on PFAS-laden equipment. Since the 1950s, PFAS have been widely used in various industrial and commercial products due to their exceptional resistance to heat, oil and water. That same resilience soon found a role in firefighting, which is why by 1963, such chemicals were introduced into aqueous film-forming foam, a Class B fire suppressant designed to combat fuel-based fires. Then, later in 1976, they were embedded in turnout gear. But the very qualities that made PFAS so effective also made them hazardous. Over time, it became clear that these so-called “forever chemicals” do not break down in the environment and accumulate in human bodies. Because of this drawback, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has warned that there is no safe level of PFAS exposure, and

even minimal contact may lead to serious health consequences. Nowhere is this risk more troubling than in the fire service. Firefighters are particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of PFAS because of repeated exposure through their turnout gear. Scientific studies have shown that all three layers of this gear — the outer shell, moisture barrier and thermal lining — contain significant amounts of PFAS. As the gear is subjected to heat, abrasion, laundering, and general wear, these chemicals are released and absorbed through the skin, inhaled, or inadvertently ingested. This routine exposure has led to significantly elevated PFAS levels in the blood of firefighters compared to the general population. More alarmingly, such exposures carry serious consequences, such as increased risks of aggressive cancers as well as thyroid dysfunction, reproductive harm, immune suppression, and developmental delays in children. Legal battles are now intensifying as affected firefighters, residents, and municipalities seek accountability for PFAS pollution

linked to hazardous firefighting equipment. As of May 1, 2025, the number of pending lawsuits in the AFFF multidistrict litigation has surged to 9,342, following the filing of 414 major cases in April alone. These lawsuits reflect growing national concern over the health and environmental damage caused by PFAS-laden products. The PFAS Alternatives Act offers a crucial pathway for communities like Pendleton County to protect firefighters from the toxic risks hidden in their protective gear. The legislation allocates \$25 million annually from fiscal years 2024 to 2028 for the research, development, and testing of PFAS-free turnout gear. Additionally, it designates \$2 million per year during the same period to support training programs aimed at reducing firefighter exposure to PFAS-contaminated equipment. This comes at a pivotal time for Kentucky, where state and local leaders are actively debating over budget priorities for equipping fire departments. While those discussions have primarily focused on immediate operation-

al needs, the issue of PFAS contamination must be part of the conversation. Without dedicated funding to transition away from hazardous materials, departments across the state, especially in rural areas, will continue to rely on gear that poses long-term health risks. Pendleton County’s fire crews, like many across Kentucky, stand at the intersection of innovation and inaction. The PFAS Alternatives Act provides the necessary resources to move forward, but only if state lawmakers recognize the urgency and align local budget decisions with federal support. This is more than a funding issue — it’s a matter of protecting the people who protect us. Now is the moment to act decisively. Ensuring that every firefighter in Kentucky has access to safe, modern equipment shouldn’t be a distant goal — it should be a budget priority. The health of our first responders depends on it.

Jonathan Sharp, CFO
Environmental Litigation
Group P.C.
Birmingham, Alabama

Local newspapers, journalists need support

Dear Editor,

In August of 2023, I watched a program on PBS that focused upon the community impact resulting from the decline of local newspapers like the Falmouth Outlook. We had recently moved and I realized that my subscription to the Outlook had expired perhaps as much as several months earlier. I went to the Outlook and immediately renewed it. Thinking about how I could have not noticed something that had been a weekly presence in my life since I moved to Pendleton County in 1979 and spurred by the reporting of Judy Woodruff on the “PBS News Hour,” I decided to investigate the root causes of the demise of local newspapers. Woodruff’s report captured on film many of the negative consequences in communities across the nation when they lose their local paper. Research identified measurable decrease in civic engagement when the small-town paper closes. In small rural towns the newspaper is often the primary source of information affecting community involvement in local politics leading to a decline in voter turnout. Citizens become less aware of local issues. At the same time, communities without the local papers showed an increase in political polarization. Though I could not identify specific examples, sources reported potentially higher costs for local governments. The major role of newspapers throughout history is to hold the government accountable. Editorials provide diverse perspectives across the political spectrum which in turn help prevent misinformation a recognized primary cause of political divisions. Perhaps the most insidious loss to a community

when their local newspaper shuts down is the lack of accountability and oversight of local elected officials and public services including police, fire and utilities. The journalists writing for local news are tasked with scrutinizing local elected officials identifying corruption waste, and mismanagement saving taxpayers countless dollars as informed citizens themselves insist on improved policies and efficiency. Many city and county actions are required by law

to be posted in the local paper, if there is one. A perusal of just about any edition of the Outlook will catch a public notice or some form of city and county communication. Many people tap into the archives of local papers for historical reference and genealogy. These records of collective community knowledge end when the local newspaper closes their doors. The shared past events and shared achievements in the local news records are the foundation

on which a community was built, losing them erodes our sense of who where we came from, where we are, and where we as a community are going. The loss of local news also impacts the local economy not just from the shutting down of a newspaper and the immediate impact upon their staff, but also on local businesses that rely upon the paper to advertise, community outreach, along with the coverage of local events that have a positive impact upon their business. It is obvious by the ads in local papers that they help fuel their regional economy. But as ads drop due to competing technological advances, so does the ability of the paper to make their financial ends meet. They cannot afford to pay journalists, and the paper’s content begins to decline. It is a vicious spiraling cycle that can only be reversed by community support. If you’ve read this far, you can help. If you pur-

chased this paper locally, why not subscribe and save? If you’re reading a neighbor’s copy, again why not subscribe so you don’t miss future editions? If you’re a subscriber, encourage your family, friends and neighbors to subscribe, too. If you have children that grew up here and moved away, why not give them a subscription so they can keep up on local events and news?

Jim Thaxton
Freelance Writer
Falmouth

NOTICE

Duke Energy Kentucky, Inc. (Duke Energy Kentucky or Company) hereby gives notice that, in an application to be filed no later than July 1, 2025, Duke Energy Kentucky will be seeking approval by the Public Service Commission, Frankfort, Kentucky, of an adjustment of its Pipeline Modernization Mechanism (Rider PMM) rates and charges proposed to become effective on and after January 1, 2026. The Commission has docketed this proceeding as Case No. 2025-00229.

DUKE ENERGY KENTUCKY PRESENT AND PROPOSED RATES

The present and proposed rates charged in all territories served by Duke Energy Kentucky are as follows:

Residential Service – Rate RS

| | |
|------------------------------|------------|
| Present Rates | |
| Rate RS, Residential Service | \$0.12/ccf |
| Proposed Rates | |
| Rate RS, Residential Service | \$0.24/ccf |

General Service – Rate GS

| | |
|--------------------------|------------|
| Present Rates | |
| Rate GS, General Service | \$0.03/ccf |
| Proposed Rates | |
| Rate GS, General Service | \$0.06/ccf |

Firm Transportation Service – Large Rate FT-L

| | |
|--|---------------|
| Present Rates | |
| Rate FT-L, Firm Transportation Service – Large | \$0.00102/ccf |
| Proposed Rates | |
| Rate FT-L, Firm Transportation Service – Large | \$0.00190/ccf |

Interruptible Transportation – Rate IT

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| Present Rates | |
| Rate IT, Interruptible Transportation | \$0.00115/ccf |
| Proposed Rates | |
| Rate IT, Interruptible Transportation | \$0.00224/ccf |

IMPACT OF PROPOSED RATES

These rates reflect an increase in gas revenues of approximately \$16,755,374 for 2026 to Duke Energy Kentucky. The allocation of this estimated increase among rate classes is as follows:

| | | |
|--|--------------|-------|
| Rate RS – Residential Service | \$14,565,782 | 86.9% |
| Rate GS – General Service | \$ 2,095,427 | 12.5% |
| Rate FT-L – Firm Transportation Service (Includes DGS) | \$ 57,136 | 0.4% |
| Rate IT – Interruptible Transportation Service | \$ 37,029 | 0.2% |

The average monthly bill for each customer class to which the proposed rates will apply will increase(decrease) approximately as follows:

| | | |
|--|----------|-------|
| Rate RS – Residential Service | \$ 6.00 | 6.32% |
| Rate GS – General Service | \$ 11.70 | 2.07% |
| Rate FT-L – Firm Transportation Service (Includes DGS) | \$ 14.52 | 0.31% |
| Rate IT – Interruptible Transportation Service | \$ 98.74 | 0.92% |

The rates contained in this notice are the rates proposed by Duke Energy Kentucky; however, the Commission may order rates to be charged that differ from the proposed rates contained in this notice. Such action may result in a rate for consumers other than the rates in this notice.

Any corporation, association, body politic or person with a substantial interest in the matter may, by written request within thirty (30) days after publication of this notice of the proposed rate changes, request leave to intervene; intervention may be granted beyond the 30-day period for good cause shown. Such motion shall be submitted to the Kentucky Public Service Commission, P.O. Box 615, 211 Sower Boulevard, Frankfort, Kentucky 40602-0615, and shall set forth the grounds for the request including the status and interest of the party. If the Commission does not receive a written request for intervention within thirty (30) days of the initial publication, the Commission may take final action on the application.

Intervenors may obtain copies of the application and other filings made by the Company by requesting same through email at DEKInquiries@duke-energy.com or by telephone at (513) 287-4366. A copy of the application and other filings made by the Company are available for public inspection through the Commission’s website at <http://psc.ky.gov>, at the Commission’s office at 211 Sower Boulevard, Frankfort, Kentucky, Monday through Friday, 8:00 am. to 4:30 p.m., and at the following Company office: Erlanger Ops Center, 1262 Cox Road, Erlanger, Kentucky 41018. Comments regarding the application may be submitted to the Public Service Commission through its website, or by mail at the following Commission address.

For further information contact:
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(513) 287-4366

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