

Senate Finance Subcommittee on General Government and Agency Review

Am. Sub. HB 49

Interested Party Testimony

Chas Adams, Assistant Chief

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Good morning, my name is Chas Adams and I am the Assistant Fire Chief of Franklin Township Fire Department in Franklin County. In only the last four years, my department has assisted in the mitigation of four large scale incidents that involved hazardous chemicals. In 2012, we were called in as the main suppression team for the train derailment that occurred just north of downtown Columbus. This situation caused the evacuation of thousands of civilians and required the efforts of hundreds of firefighters and first responders.

In 2015, we had a large tanker fire that disabled Interstate 70 on the westside for a month causing multiple traffic concerns and problems. Late on that year we mitigated a tanker rollover in Dublin, Ohio which released 8000 gallons of Ethanol fuel. And just this past January, we were called to extinguish a large tanker rollover and fire that occurred at State Route 33 and Interstate 270 in which we had a loss of life of the driver but no other injuries to civilians or first responders.

The one thing that these incidents all had in common was that we were able to identify, and then plan a course of action, due to the availability of information of the chemicals we were dealing with. It was a simple phone call to Chemtrec when we had a full-scale train derailment and fire. For the three tanker rollovers, it was a call to the trucking company or having an available bill of lading that properly identified the chemicals. We then utilized our Emergency Response Guidebook which tells us the proper name of the chemical, how it reacts to fire and suppression efforts, its effect on human life, evacuation perimeters, first aid needs, and a myriad of other information that is paramount to keeping workers, civilians, and first responders safe in case of an incident. For lack of a better term, this resource is our bible when it comes to safely handling these situations.

This is why I stand before you today. The chemical reporting loophole in Ohio law that allows “trade secret” chemical information to be withheld from first responders during oil and gas related emergencies is a direct threat on the safety of anyone involved in the emergency efforts needed in case of a spill, fire, or other hazard involving these chemicals.

I fear that these incidents of spills, fires, and other emergencies will only increase in the future. There is an increase of chemical transportation on the roads due to the natural gas and oil “boom” we have seen in Ohio. This is combined with an increase of vehicle accidents due to the many distractions in today’s world. Two of the incidents above were investigated as “distracted driving incidents”.

Throughout my career, and speaking for all first responders, our mission is to protect lives and property. This takes a knowledge of what to expect. Without proper information, we needlessly put civilians and other first responders lives in danger because of “trade secrets”. We are there to do a job. It is sometimes an extremely dangerous job. But we are willing to take risks for the betterment of the public and the safety of each other as long as we know the possible dangers. Lives cannot be placed at risk due to lack of knowledge.

Fire Chiefs and first responders aren’t in the business of trading secrets to other chemical companies. Our job is to make sure people are safe and that everyone goes home. I ask you to please consider the public and your first responders, and I hope that we can advance an amendment that will close this chemical reporting loophole.

I want to thank you for this opportunity to speak to the committee today and I would be happy to answer any questions to the best of my ability.