

**Senate Finance Subcommittee on General Government and Agency
Review
Am. Sub. HB 49
Interested Party Testimony
Michael Knowlton, Fire Chief
Neffs Fire Department
May 23, 2017**

My name is Michael Knowlton, and I am the fire chief at Neffs Fire Department in Belmont County. I have served in this role for the last three years. In total, I have over 30 years of firefighting experience. I am also a Haz-mat tech for the Belmont County Haz-Mat team. When there is a fire, a chemical spill, or other emergency event that threatens the health and safety of my community, I am one of the first people on the scene.

Most of the time, my job is pretty straight forward; if there is a fire or chemical spill that needs cleaned up, my team and I know exactly what we need to do. We know what equipment we need to bring, we know the health risks we are incurring, and most importantly, we know how to handle the situation quickly and without further incident. We are able to do this because in almost every case we are given all the relevant information about what chemicals are present and what other hazards we might encounter at the scene the minute we arrive, if not before. Unfortunately, there is one major exception to this rule.

Under Ohio law, oil and gas producers are allowed to withhold extremely important fracking related chemical information from emergency first responders during emergency events. Specifically, producers can withhold from first responders the identities of trade-secret protected chemicals even when those chemicals have already been released into the environment. This means that whenever there is a fracking fluid spill, well blowout, or other oil and gas related emergency event, first responders are forced to do guess work and waste both time and money on lab tests in order to identify those chemicals that have been withheld. We need this information to do our jobs, and we shouldn't have to waste time trying to piece together a comprehensive list of chemicals when that information could be made readily available to us.

I understand that oil and gas is a vital part of our state's economy, and that many companies are responsible operators. However, no matter how responsible a company what safeguards they put in place, accidents can still happen. For example, my department recently responded to an incident where a tanker truck full of hydrochloric acid leaked out at a well site. Fortunately, in this case, we knew what chemical we were dealing with, and my team along with the Belmont County Haz-Mat team, were able to quickly contain and clean up the spill.

As a fire chief I am responsible for protecting the health and safety of our community members. I cannot meet this high standard without having all the necessary tools at my disposal. As first responders we need access to the identity of all chemical additives including those listed as trade secrets whenever there is an emergency event. That is why I am asking you to close the chemical reporting loophole in Ohio law, and to require oil and gas producers to share all chemical information with first responders during emergency events.

Thank you for your time.