

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: July 18, 2020

For Information: Joe Ritchie, 518-526-9543, Jritchie@syr.edu

Elizabeth Moran, 518-610-1828, Emoran@nypirg.org

OVER 100 PROMINENT ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMUNITY LEADERS CALL ON GOVERNOR CUOMO TO SIGN BILL THAT WOULD BAN THE BURNING OF TOXIC FIREFIGHTING FOAM AT NORLITE INCINERATOR IN COHOES, NY

(Cohoes, NY) Cohoes residents and advocates joined together at the Saratoga Sites in Cohoes, NY to call on Governor Cuomo to sign legislation that would ban the incineration of aqueous film-forming foam (also known as AFFF) and associated perfluorocarbon (PFAS) chemicals in Cohoes, NY at the Norlite Hazardous Waste facility. They also released a letter signed by over 100 state and national environmental organizations supporting the signing of the legislation. The legislation was unanimously passed by the New York State Legislature on June 10, 2020.

The letter is attached as was co-signed by NY Public Interest Research Group, The League of Women Voters, Saratoga Sites Against Norlite Emissions, Environmental Advocates, Media Alliance, Environmental Working Group, Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council, Riverkeeper, Greenpeace and many others.

The state bill, Assembly bill 9952B and Senate bill Senate 7788B, is sponsored by Assemblymember John McDonald and Senator Neil Breslin.

In 2018 and 2019, the Norlite incinerator in Cohoes, NY burned over 2 million pounds of toxic firefighting foam containing PFAS chemicals. The chemicals came from 25 states. The burning took place with no environmental review, no notification of the public and without the benefit of a “test burn” which is legally required before new toxic materials like this are burned. Federal and state environmental agencies did nothing to protect the health of residents from this burning.

The incinerator is located next to the Saratoga Sites public housing complex where over 70 families live. The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation has designated the area where Norlite is located as an environmental justice area.

Joe Ritchie, a 20-year resident of Saratoga Sites and president of Saratoga Sites Against Norlite Emissions, said, “this is a very serious environmental justice issue facing my community. I spent my entire life living in the shadow of this toxic incinerator. It has a long history of pollution problems and if Cohoes was a more affluent community, Governor Cuomo would have addressed this issue years ago. We need him to sign this bill now.”

Chris Sevinsky, PhD said, “My wife and I are raising 4 children with Norlite’s ominous smokestacks visible just a mile from our home. Knowing that Norlite has violated the Clean Air Act by exceeding limits on many occasions, the addition of PFAS incineration leaves us deeply concerned. Norlite’s history of violations demonstrates a flagrant disregard for the environment

and the lives of people living in local communities. As a first step, Governor Cuomo must sign the bill to stop PFAS incineration.”

Liz Moran, environmental policy director for the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG), said, “There is zero evidence that burning firefighting foam with PFAS is safe, and it would be unjust and dangerous to make the residents of Cohoes and neighboring communities the test subjects of this practice. Numerous New York communities, like Hoosick Falls, Petersburgh, Newburgh, and those on Long Island, have already been reeling from devastating PFAS drinking water contamination. New York cannot allow any more communities to suffer this fate. Governor Cuomo has the opportunity to lead the country by signing legislation that bans this practice in Cohoes – we urge him to do so immediately.”

In addition to calling on Governor Cuomo to sign the bill, the League of Women Voters of Albany County called on the members of the Albany County Legislature to pass Albany County Clean Air Act, local law B. That legislation would prohibit the burning of toxic firefighting foam at Norlite, prohibit the burning of tires at the Lafarge Cement plant in Coeymans, NY and provide other clean air protections in Albany County. The public is encouraged to testify by zoom at the public hearing on that bill on Thursday evening, July 28th. Details on the website of the Albany County Legislature.

Patricia Sibilia, President, League of Women Voters of Albany County, said “The League of Women Voters, nationally, statewide and locally, has adopted advocacy positions on clean air, solid waste, public health and preservation of natural resources for over 50 years of our 100 year history. The air pollution created by Norlite does not stay contained within the city of Cohoes boundaries. It affects surrounding cities, towns and counties. In addition to affecting the air we breathe, it also impacts our soil and water. The League of Women Voters urges Governor Cuomo to sign the McDonald / Breslin state bill into law to protect our health. The Albany County Legislature needs to protect their citizens by passing Local Law B, the proposed Albany Clean Air Act.”

Finally, there will be a Norlite town hall meeting on zoom to discuss ongoing and persistent problems with burning large amounts of hazardous waste in Cohoes. It will take place on Thursday, July 23 at 6:30pm Speaking at the town hall meeting will be: Jane Williams with the Sierra Club Clean Air team, Joe Ritchie of Saratoga Sites Against Norlite Emissions and a representative of the NY Department of Environmental Conservation. It will be moderated by Corrine Carey with the Hudson Mohawk Magazine. The zoom town hall is free. Pre- register at Media.Sanctuary.Org