



Friends of Sligo Creek  
P. O. Box 11572  
Takoma Park, MD 20913

October 22, 2024

To: Geoffrey Donahue, Director, Office of Emergency Preparedness and Response, MDE  
cc: Neil A. Jones, Haz-Mat Response Supervisor, Office of Emergency Preparedness and Response, MDE

D.Lee Currey, Director, Water and Science Administration

Brad Metzger, District Manager, Frostburg Field Office, Water and Science Administration, MDE

Kate Ansalvish, Environmental Compliance Specialist, Water and Science Administration, MDE

Steve Martin, Environmental Compliance Supervisor, Department of Environmental Protection, Montgomery County

Matt Harper, Natural Resources Manager, Montgomery Parks

Trey Sherard, Anacostia Riverkeeper

Maureen Mitchell, Watershed Program Manager, Anacostia Riverkeeper

Kit Gage, Advocacy Committee Chair, FOSC

Dean Tousley, Water Quality Committee Chair, FOSC

Dear Director Donahue:

I am writing on behalf of the Friends of Sligo Creek (FOSC), a community-based non-profit organization incorporated in the State of Maryland in 2002. Our mission is to protect, improve, and appreciate the ecological health of Sligo Creek and its surrounding watershed in Prince George's and Montgomery Counties.

I am writing to express FOSC's disappointment and concern that MDE did not require the Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS) to clean up the firefighting foam they used to put out a recent car fire in Sligo Creek and any toxic substances that escaped into the Creek from the burning vehicle itself.

On Wednesday, October 16, 2024, just after midnight, an SUV was found ablaze in Sligo Creek near Heather Avenue in Takoma Park. The MCFRS responded and put out the flame with the PFAS-free product "National Foam - Universal Green". They reported to your emergency response folks that the foam and a car that had been on fire were in the Creek. They asked whether they were required to do anything more. Your people told them

they did not have to clean up or mitigate the discharges to protect the environment. The car was removed from Sligo Creek at some point.

The foam was extremely thick and blanketed a stretch of Sligo Creek. Below are 3 photos of the foam, sent through the FOSC-DEP Water WatchDog pollution-reporting partnership:

- Photo 1 shows the foam around 9.30am October 16, roughly 9 hours after the event.
- Photo 2 shows the foam in the early afternoon the same day.
- Photo 3 shows that the residual patch of foam still covered the creek from bank to bank roughly 35 hours after the initial incident report, although it was significantly smaller than on October 16. The foam was no longer evident by Friday morning October 18. This suggests there was ample time to mitigate the extent of the foam's impact on the creek by vacuuming or otherwise removing it, preferably the day it appeared.

More details are below, including a link to the local press report and a photo of remaining litter. The Safety Data Sheet (SDS) is attached to the email.

## **OUR COMMENTS AND CONCERNS**

On the positive side, we strongly applaud the MCFRS for not using a PFAS product on the vehicle in Sligo Creek. This is a change from previous years and a major step forward. Also, we sincerely support the brave and smart efforts of the MCFRS to put out the car fire. Moreover, we were very impressed by the fact that they quickly reported the problem to MDE and sought your view on whether they were required to do more.

However, the decision by MDE's Emergency Response Division not to require immediate steps to remediate the situation seems fundamentally wrong to us. We are extremely concerned that the product used may not actually be environmentally safe, even though it did not contain PFAS. The SDS contains warnings that the foam should not enter ground water, surface water or storm drains. In addition to the toxic substances that have likely entered the Creek from the foam, car fluids (including oil, gas and brake fluids) and other car components (including toxic electronics and metals) most certainly also entered the Creek. In the event of oil and gas spills, for example, our understanding is that creek clean-up is standard practice - which makes the MDE decision in this case even more puzzling. While the foam broke up on its own over several days (we did not have rain), we don't know the extent to which it left toxicants in the Creek and downstream. We have similar concerns over the car material discharges.

What would have been involved for the MCFRS to clean up the site in the Creek? To what extent were fiscal and other resource considerations involved in the MDE decision? Are there tests that MDE can conduct to assess whether there are any harms to Sligo Creek and the Anacostia Watershed? What should we do in future foam-related situations?

We are also very troubled by the apparent interpretation of the MS4 Permit provisions that seem to give our firefighters a free pass to not clean up foam and other byproducts of critical

firefighting situations that may hurt our waterways. We would like clarification on this issue so we all are aware of the protocol for critical events going forward.

Finally, we have just been informed that debris remains around the site. While we have a Litter Committee that normally pick up trash, we are worried that there may be toxic substances that they could be exposed to. Can MDE mobilize a crew to finish the clean up? The photo of remaining litter sent October 21 from a member of the FOSC community is below (Photo 4).

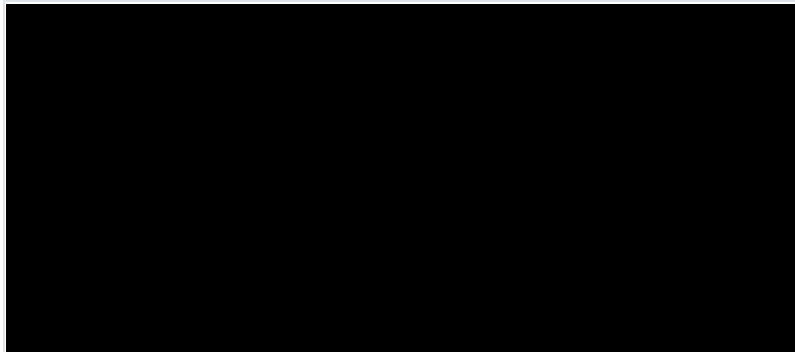
Thank you for your consideration and guidance.

Sincerely,

Elaine Lamirande  
President, Friends of Sligo Creek  
president@fosc.org

#### DETAILS

- [Police Respond to Stolen Vehicle Report; SUV Found Torched in Creek Moments Later - The MoCo Show](#)



#### **Police Respond to Stolen Vehicle Report; SUV Found Torched in Creek Mome...**

MCS Staff

On October 16, at approximately 12:11 am, Takoma Park Police responded to the 900 block of Merrimac Drive (7-11)...

- An FOSC eyewitness account, October 17:

"Approximately 35 hours after the car fire was extinguished, there's still a sizable (10x25 ft.) patch of foam on the creek at the first downstream slackwater, just downstream of the Heather Ave pedestrian bridge. It's much smaller than yesterday afternoon. Looking close, I could see little patches of the foam slowly breaking off at the leading edge...The separated patches of foam seem to have disappeared within about 100 feet. Creek flow is very low, so dilution will be about as low as it gets.

I just closely visually inspected the creek at about 6 sites between Heather and New Hampshire (~1/4 mile). I saw many minnows and a few bigger fish (~3 in.) swimming in pools, and no dead fish at all. In fact, there were minnows in the pool right below where the foam was breaking off the large patch.

... I'm quite sure the foam eventually broke up on its own, but it took 2 full days. Nobody did any cleanup. I checked it each day, and the big patch of foam that collected on the first slack-water downstream of the fire just slowly dissipated. There were at least 30 hours when much of it could have been suctioned up."

- Photo 1: our first reported image of the firefighting foam in Sligo Creek, October 16 around 9.30am, roughly 9 hours after the event.



- Photo 2: Our second reported image of the firefighting foam in Sligo Creek, around 1.30, October 16, more than 12 hours after the event.



- Photo 3: Our third reported image of the foam in Sligo Creek, October 17, around 35 hours after the event



- Photo 4: Taken October 21 by a member of the FOSC community, debris remaining in Sligo Creek near the Heather Avenue parking lot from the October 16 car fire in Sligo Creek

