



UFF Position Statement: Fire Fighter Cancer Awareness Education and Prevention

The findings of several previous studies on fire fighter cancer have documented that fire fighters are at an increased risk for contracting occupational cancer. These studies cut across international boundaries with participation from Nordic, Australian, and U.S. fire fighters; and underscore the stark reality regarding the risk of occupational cancer in the fire service.

In 2015, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) completed a study on fire fighter cancer in collaboration with researchers at the National Cancer Institute and the University of California at Davis Department of Public Health Sciences. The study was supported by the U.S. Fire Administration and included nearly 30,000 fire fighters from San Francisco, Philadelphia, and Chicago fire departments. Findings indicated that fire fighters are at a greater risk of contracting certain types of cancer.

The NIOSH study recommends that the fire service should have an increased focus on educating and advocating for safe work practices and procedures. These practices should include training on the proper use of protective clothing and self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) during all phases of fire response.

The fire service is responding to the challenge of fire fighter cancer and working to protect its members in a myriad of ways. One particular resource is a white paper titled *Taking Action Against Cancer in the Fire Service* published by the Firefighter Cancer Support Network with 11 recommended preventative actions. These recommendations, along with other pro-active initiatives being advocated across the fire service, promise to minimize the impact of cancer on the fire service. Suggested best practices include:

- Use SCBA from initial attack to finish of overhaul
- Conduct gross field decontamination of PPE to remove as much soot and particulates as possible
- Utilize Wet-Naps or baby wipes to remove as much soot as possible from head, neck, jaw, throat, underarms and hands immediately, while on the scene
- Change your clothes and wash them immediately after a fire
- Shower thoroughly after a fire
- Clean your PPE, gloves, hood and helmet immediately after a fire
- Do not take contaminated clothes or PPE home or store them in your vehicle
- Decontaminate fire apparatus interior after a fire
- Keep bunker gear out of living spaces and sleeping quarters
- Stop using tobacco products
- Apply sunscreen or sun block
- Install washer extractors to clean PPE after a fire
- Issue a second set of firefighting PPE to lessen the likelihood of wearing contaminated PPE
- Direct source capture systems to remove vehicle exhaust from stations

Another campaign aimed at confronting cancer in the fire service has been the effort to pass fire fighter cancer presumption legislation. Cancer presumption legislation has been enacted in more than 30 states in the U.S. and at least 10 provinces in Canada. Each state or province varies in the number and types of fire fighter cancers covered. In many cases legislation is either limited, constrained, or not passed at all due to the fear of increased liability on the state or provincial government.

It is clear that the cancer is viewed as one of the most important present-day issues facing the fire service. Given its importance, fire service leaders should work to include the current body of knowledge surrounding fire service occupational cancer into the training curriculum for all entry level and incumbent fire fighters. A national initial baseline course should be developed along with regular continuing education courses as the fire service learns to better protect its fire fighters. The premise behind this initiative would be to change the culture of the fire service by making occupational cancer awareness a requirement for entrance into the service. Education should be enacted across every level of the fire service and include legislation efforts, references within standards, and coverage in all applicable fire fighting text books. Ensuring that our current and future fire fighters know how to protect themselves and their families from occupational cancer is as important as teaching them the science of fire behavior and fire fighting tactics.

Metro/UFF Chiefs Action

The Metro/Urban Fire Forum Chiefs support the work of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and endorse the organization's development of educational and awareness level materials related to fire fighter cancer and contamination. The Metro/Urban Fire Forum Chiefs will continue taking an active leadership role in the development of information and procedures that fully prepare the fire service, law enforcement, EMS community and emergency management practitioners to safely, efficiently and effectively respond to occupational cancer risks.