



UFF Position Statement: Support Firefighter Injury and Exposure Data Collection

A recent report from NIST entitled ‘*The Economics of Firefighter Injuries*,’ identifies, summarizes, and evaluates the available data and the literature describing the economic costs associated with non-fatal firefighter injuries, illnesses, health exposures, and occupational disease resulting from line-of-duty activities. While the number of fire incidents and injuries have been trending downward, the decline in non-fatal firefighter injuries has been slower. Research exists that describes the cause, nature, and severity of firefighter injuries. However, as the NIST *Economics of Firefighter Injuries* report states, less is known of the economic impact non-fatal injuries produce.

The report suggests that the measured cost of firefighter injuries to range from \$1.6 billion to \$5.9 billion annually. The report also provides a discussion of the current measurement challenges that limit a complete and throughout accounting of those costs associated with non-fatal firefighter injuries, illnesses, health exposures, and occupational disease. Therefore, the measured cost of firefighter injuries in the report should be viewed as a conservative, lower-bound estimate. The report further noted that data gaps exist, largely due to latency issues in capturing the incidence and economic consequences associated with firefighter cancer and other occupational diseases, including post-traumatic stress injuries.

Necessary Actions

With the current focus on data throughout the fire service, the Metropolitan Fire Chiefs gathered for the Urban Fire Forum understand that it is imperative for fire service leaders and chief officers to facilitate better data collection in all areas the fire service including the firefighter injury and exposure arena.

If better quantification and annual tracking of firefighter injuries, illnesses, health exposures, and occupational disease are to occur, improvements in data collection are needed. Because data collection efforts require time and resources, such efforts are likely only sustainable if the information derived from these efforts are aligned with incentives for their collection—i.e., the effort of increased data collection should be at least proportional to its usefulness to fire departments. Metro Chiefs understand the power of feedback to field personnel and exhibiting usefulness of data in operational and budget reporting to decision makers. Other notable incentives include long term reduction in the frequency and severity of injuries, illnesses, health exposures, and occupational disease.

Improving the frequency and consistency of data collection efforts requires mechanisms or tools to reduce barriers of data entry, including leveraging pre-existing systems to reduce the burden on resources. For example, the Metropolitan Fire Chiefs and the UFF have previously supported

the NFORS data tool that automates real-time data collection through connection with pre-existing CAD or RMS systems, eliminating touch points, data entry duplication, and error, while providing enhanced data analytics and visualization capabilities for departments. The NFORS Exposure Tracking Module allows firefighters to document and track incident and health exposures, fully integrated with CAD or RMS data, over their career.

Actions to improve firefighter injury and exposure data collection at the local level include the following measures.

- Track the incidence of exposures and resulting occupational disease, and long-term health consequences
 - Use a validated exposure or injury tracker that is consistent between departments
 - Provide regular firefighter health screenings
 - Participate in the National Firefighter [Cancer] Registry
- Seek better understanding of mental health and post-traumatic stress injuries, their impact on fire departments, and direction of future trends
 - Facilitate firefighter tracking of traumatic event exposures using a validated exposure tracker
- Seek to better understand the costs related to injuries
 - Gather information at the department level on direct and indirect cost data specific to firefighting activities
 - Track and report injury backfill costs for injured firefighters and the results of any related injury litigation
 - Advocate for a link of hospital injury data to individual occupation