



Position Statement

Support for the National Fire Service Cancer Initiative

Submitted by the IAFC Volunteer & Combination Officers Section

The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) adopts the position to encourage chiefs of fire and rescue departments to support the National Fire Service Cancer Initiative that is being facilitated by the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation and Firefighter Cancer Support Network and their efforts to protect our members from a disease which effects firefighters at a rate three times higher than the average public.

With the rate of firefighter deaths linked to cancer growing every year, we also encourage departments to look for other ways to be proactive in alleviating exposure to known toxins and carcinogens. We strongly support the funding for, and provision of, secondary firefighting hoods and gear bags to transport Personal Protective Ensemble (PPE) as ways to mitigate exposure to such carcinogens. Furthermore, we encourage the continuous use of SCBA through overhaul and the use of disposable wipes at every fire during rehab to remove potential carcinogens.

Providing a second firefighting hood to members allows the ability to switch to a clean hood after each fire while the other hood is being decontaminated. As hoods make direct contact with the body, cancer-causing materials are being absorbed directing through the skin. The use of a secondary hood while the other is out for decontamination will alleviate this consistent contact and reduce exposure.

In addition to providing hoods, departments should provide gear bags to members that are transporting PPE in their Personally Owned Vehicle (POV) to assist in preventing exposure to carcinogens by the member and their families. Many volunteer firefighters transport their gear in the trunks of their vehicles, where temperatures can rise and allow for the off-gassing of toxins and carcinogens into the passenger compartment. This can cause exposure that will further endanger the member and their family members.

The IAFC strongly recommends that all fire and emergency service agencies/organizations develop written policies and have procedures in place to support and enforce these policy recommendations. For further information to assist with the development of these policies, both the Volunteer and Combination Officers Section and the Safety, Health and Survival Section of the IAFC recommends the Firefighter Cancer Support Network as a resource for current studies and white papers on all aspects of cancer related illnesses in the fire service.

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