

Health & Safety Office Update

Uniformed Firefighters Association

EVERYONE GOES HOME!

As we approach the end of the first year with a change in staffing due to the Roster Staffing Agreement, we have noted a serious increase in burns among our members. As staffing is decreased, risks to our membership increase. Members should ask themselves about risk versus reward on scenes to help decrease potential injuries to themselves and other members. The most important aspect still remains that at the end of the tour, you go home safely to your family.

With these thoughts, the Sergeant-At-Arms / Health and Safety Officer Bill Romaka wants to encourage all members to look for any chances to improve their personal health and safety. While we know that burns have increased, please remember that reduced staffing can result in an increased amount of stress placed on your heart. We all know we have to work harder when there are less of us. Good health practices are an important part of not getting injured.



March, 2012

This extra workload increases your blood pressure and heart rate to a dangerous level. While you can't control how many firefighters are on a job or how much work is required, you can control what type of shape you are in when you show up to it. The healthier and more fit you are, the less likely you will suffer an injury to your back, your joints or to your heart. Drinking lots of fluid ensures proper hydration throughout your tour and makes a tremendous difference on how well you will perform your job. Dehydration places tremendous stress on your heart.

Take care of yourself, whether it is your day on or your day off. Proper nutrition and care of the body helps ensure that you are fit for duty, something that is crucial when we are at reduced staffing.

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Prostate Cancer and Firefighters

Getting checked for prostate problems is important. For firefighters though, it is even more important to ensure a healthy prostate. Why? Firefighters are at an increased risk for prostate cancer. As with all cancers, early detection of prostate cancer is crucial.

The prostate is a small gland that surrounds the urethra, which empties urine from the body. The prostate produces most of the semen, so blood may appear in semen with prostate cancer. The prostate increases in size with age. Risk factors for prostate cancer include advanced age, a family history of prostate cancer and African-American race. Firefighters are exposed to many carcinogens on a regular basis due to the nature of firefighting. Prostate cancer at younger ages may result due to this exposure.

Prostate screening tests include a digital rectal exam and a blood test called a prostate specific antigen (PSA). These tests are part of an annual physical exam. However, you should schedule an appointment with your health care provider if you have any signs or symptoms of prostate cancer. These include difficulty urinating, frequent urination or blood in your urine or semen.

Other prostate problems may include prostatitis, which is inflammation of the prostate gland and benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), which is enlargement of the prostate gland. BPH may cause urination problems.

It is important to realize that there are things you can do to lower your risk of prostate cancer. Your diet plays an important role in the prevention of prostate cancer, as well as many other types of cancer. A diet high in fat, particularly animal fats, has been linked to cancer. Tomatoes and tomato-based foods may reduce your risk of prostate cancer. Eating a wide assortment of fruits, vegetables, nuts and whole grains also can lower your risk of cancer. As always, getting plenty of exercise also can help prevent cancer. Be sure to shower as soon as possible after a job or any toxic exposure to reduce the amount of time your body is exposed to possible carcinogens. The important thing to remember is to eat a healthy diet, exercise and visit your health care provider at least once a year for a check-up! Don't hesitate to call the Health and Safety Office with any questions!

Firehouse Repairs

Just a reminder that any safety issues regarding firehouses must first be reported to the Officer on duty and the Resource Center. These include problems with plumbing, sewage, broken Nedermans, maintenance issues and rodent infestations. The Officer should call the Resource Center at 718-999-4357 between Monday to Friday from 7AM to 3PM. After hours is for emergencies only. The Resource Center will give a Work Order Number to the Officer. Please allow a reasonable amount of time for the concern to be addressed. After a suitable amount of time, the Officer may follow-up on the issue to determine what needs to be done to correct the problem.

If you believe there is an immediate health and safety issue, please have your Officer follow the above steps, obtain the Work Order Number and the date it was obtained and then notify the Health and Safety Officer/Sergeant-At-Arms for assistance.

High Blood Pressure Health

Hypertension is a silent, tragic killer—silent because it strikes without warning symptoms and tragic because it can be avoided with diet, exercise and medication; in fact, there are now many medications for hypertension that the Bureau of Health Services (BHS) has approved for full duty. High blood pressure is a leading cause of heart disease and many firefighter do not have their blood pressure controlled. Firefighters die from heart disease more than any other cause. On average, forty-five percent of all line of duty deaths are from heart conditions. According to an article by Dr. Kerry Kelly (2009), “the Bureau of Health Services is committed to good health. Blood pressure is a treatable condition. Life style modifications are the first step in dropping blood pressure. If medication is required, medications can be selected that are compatible with full duty.”

High blood pressure is when your blood pressure reading is greater than 140/90mmHg. Blood pressure should be approximately 120/80. If you have two readings where you blood pressure is greater than 140/90, you are considered to have high blood pressure. Either the top or bottom number may indicate that you have hypertension; both numbers do not necessarily have to be elevated for your doctor to determine that you are hypertensive. It is important that you control hypertension as early as possible. High blood pressure injures the heart, kidneys and brain. It can lead to heart attacks, strokes and cardiac arrest, particularly in firefighters.

It is important to have your blood pressure checked regularly and at various times throughout your day. Keep a log of your readings to share with your health care professional. Watch your salt and saturated fat intake. Foods high in salt and saturated fat worsen high blood pressure. A diet high in fresh fruits and veggies helps lower blood pressure. Exercise daily. Aerobic activity improves cardiovascular health and conditioning. It is recommended to try to limit alcohol consumption to two drinks per day for men and one per day for women. If you smoke, you should take steps to quit. Smoking does permanent damage to your blood vessels. BHS runs a highly successful, confidential tobacco cessation program. Please call 718-999-1942 for an appointment. Maintaining a healthy weight is also important to control blood pressure. Weight gain increases your blood pressure; taking extra pounds off may help lower your blood pressure to a healthier range.

If lifestyle changes don't work to control your blood pressure, medications may be necessary. There are a wide variety of blood pressure medications available today. BHS can provide a list of medications to your health care provider that are approved for full duty status. The important thing is to take proper care of your health so that you can remain an active and healthy firefighter.

If you would like more information sent to you on high blood pressure, heart health and firefighters, please call Bernadette Royce at 212-545-6965 or email her at broyce@ufanyc.org. We have a variety of pamphlets and informational packets available on this topic. Be safe.

The UFA Health and Safety Office would like to thank Dr. Kerry Kelly, Dr. David Prezant and Ms. Mary T. McLaughlin of the Bureau of Health Services for their assistance with this article. If you have any questions regarding which medications are acceptable for full duty status, BHS may be reached at 718-999-1918.

Colds, Flues and Pneumonias

Over the past few months, families and friends may have had opportunities to get together for festivities and fun. While many people will suffer from a cold and the flu during the winter months, it is important to remember that the most important way to prevent the spread of infection is hand washing. You should also talk to your healthcare provider regarding whether or not you should receive the flu vaccine.

However, while a cold or flu may make you feel miserable for a few days, pneumonia is a much more serious lung infection than influenza. Influenza is caused by a virus; it results in chills, fever, muscles aches and pains, sore throat, cough, and generalized weakness. Pneumonia is much more serious than influenza. Influenza may lead to pneumonia; however, pneumonia may result from a variety of causes. Other than viruses, bacteria, fungi and chemicals may also cause pneumonia in individuals. Pneumonia causes the small air sacs of your lungs to fill with fluid, preventing oxygen from reaching your blood. This may even lead to death in some individuals.

While anyone can get pneumonia, some people are more likely to develop it than others. People spread pneumonia by coughing, sneezing and having close contact with another person while ill. While the elderly and young children are at increased risk for pneumonia, other groups are too. If you just had surgery, have a weakened immune system, recently had a severe illness or have a chronic disease, such as lung disease, heart disease, diabetes or kidney disease, you are also at increased risk for contacting pneumonia.

Pneumonia shares many of the same signs and symptoms of influenza; however the person is usually sicker. The signs and symptoms of pneumonia include fever, headache, muscle aches, chills, coughing, sweating, shortness of breath or rapid breathing, a sore throat and chest pain. If you have any of the signs and symptoms of pneumonia, you should see your health care provider. Please remember that if you or a loved one has chest pain or difficulty breathing, you should seek medical attention immediately.

If you have pneumonia, you may need treatment. Antibiotics are given for bacterial pneumonia. Most pneumonia can be treated at home, but it may be necessary to be hospitalized. It is important to rest to ensure that you fully recover from pneumonia. A relapse of pneumonia is often worse than the initial attack of the disease.

There is a vaccine available to help prevent some types of bacterial pneumonia. It is often given to those in high-risk groups. If you are in a high-risk group for pneumonia, you should discuss the vaccine with your health care provider. However, since pneumonia often results from the flu, a flu shot each year is also good prevention. Please remember that smoking increases your risk for any lung infection. It is also important to eat right, and exercise to increase your resistance to disease. If you have any questions about pneumonia, please feel free to contact us at the UFA or speak with your health care provider.

Lt. Rob Brown of FDNY, a Physician Assistant and Director of the New York Firefighter's Heart and Lung Institute provides training in firefighter cardiac and lung issues as part of the Health and Safety Office Grant. To schedule training with Lt. Brown, please email Tony Caracciolo at tonyc@ufanyc.org.

Diesel Exhaust

Diesel exhaust, found in every firehouse, contains more than forty toxic air contaminants. Many of these are known carcinogenic (cancer-causing) substances, including benzene, formaldehyde, polyaromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), and arsenic. Other harmful pollutants found in diesel exhaust include nitrogen oxide and carbon monoxide (CO). Chronic diesel exposure in firefighters has been linked to serious health outcomes. These include the risks associated with carbon monoxide poisoning. Please read the article on the following page regarding the risks of carbon monoxide, as well as the signs and symptoms of it for further information regarding CO poisoning specifically. But diesel exhaust is more than just carbon monoxide. Studies have indicated that diesel exhaust is a possible carcinogen and therefore, there is no safe level of exposure to diesel exhaust.

General Recommendations

It is recommended that all firefighters reduce their exposure to diesel exhaust emissions. The amount of exposure a firefighter will have depends upon a number of factors, including the type of apparatus, ventilation available at the firehouse, weather conditions for the day and the number of runs. Certain actions can reduce exhaust exposure in the firehouse.

1. Apparatus maintenance should be followed. If an apparatus still has a high particulate and gas emission despite regular maintenance, it should be removed from service and repaired. If it must be used, it should be utilized at a firehouse where there is excellent ventilation.
2. Do not let an apparatus idle in the firehouse. Apparatus should always be attached to the Nederman system when running in quarters.
3. Apparatus should be positioned so the exhaust pipes are not directed towards living quarters. If this is not possible, the exhaust pipe should be redirected.
4. All doors leading to the living quarters or offices should be weather-stripped to prevent the infiltration of diesel exhaust. Discuss this with your officer on how to proceed.
5. Any equipment with an internal combustion engine should be checked outside the building.
6. The ventilation system of the apparatus bay should be tested yearly to ensure that build-up of exhaust gases will not occur.

The Nederman System should be utilized at all times. If the system is broken, notify the officer on duty immediately. Your officer should then call the Resource Center at 718-999-4357 (M-F, 7AM-3PM, after hours for emergency only). The officer will be given a work order. After a reasonable amount of time, the officer may call back to determine what has been done to address the situation. If the situation is of immediate concern, please make sure the above steps have been followed, obtain the Work Order Number and call Sergeant-At-Arms / Health and Safety Officer Bill Romaka at 212-545-6964. Diesel exhaust is a risk to your health and safety. All attempts should be made to minimize your exposure to it. If you believe you have had an exposure to diesel exhaust or another source of carbon monoxide, you should protect yourself by completing a CD-73 exposure report. Sample forms are available at www.ufanyc.org in the Health and Safety section. If you have any questions concerning the risks of diesel exhaust or any other health and safety topic, please feel free to contact the UFA Health and Safety Office at 212-545-6965 or email healthandsafety@ufanyc.org.

Carbon Monoxide's Lingerin Risk

The hazard of carbon monoxide (CO) is no secret to firefighters. This colorless, odorless, tasteless gas is present at every fire as a result of incomplete combustion of fossil fuels. CO is found throughout the environment; however, at high enough levels, it may result in CO poisoning. CO may also cause permanent damage to your heart and chronic exposure may help result in hearing loss.

CO starves your body's cells of oxygen. Your blood uses a molecule, hemoglobin, to transport oxygen to your cells. The attraction between CO and hemoglobin is over two hundred times greater than the attraction between oxygen and hemoglobin. Depending upon the level of CO in the atmosphere, the signs and symptoms of CO poisoning may vary from a headache and nausea after several hours of constant exposure to death in a matter of minutes. Please see the chart below concerning the signs and symptoms of CO poisoning compared to its level.

Monitors are available at a fire scene to assess the level of CO attached to your red blood cells. Depending upon the level and/or how you are feeling, you may be transported to the hospital for further care.

However, as doctors have discovered, CO toxicity is not just a problem that affects a person for a limited time. There are long-term effects of exposure to CO, especially for individuals, like firefighters, who have repeated exposures to CO. Recent studies indicate that CO may cause damage to the heart beyond just depriving it of oxygen. Even after the CO has been removed from the blood, there still may be lasting damage to the heart muscle, reducing the heart's ability to pump blood efficiently to the rest of the body.

Chronic CO exposure, in the presence of chronic excessive noise, also may lead to hearing loss. The presence of the CO may lead to increased hearing loss than would normally occur from the chronic noise alone. Members should wear hearing protection when checking out gas- and diesel-powered equipment and always be sure to operate all equipment in a well-ventilated area. Hearing protection alone may not protect from hearing damage when there are higher levels of CO in the immediate environment. Always be sure to use the Nederman when the apparatus is in quarters. CO is just one of the dangers that firefighters face. While you know that it can kill you and the people you work to protect in a matter of minutes, also be aware that cumulative exposure to increased CO levels in the atmosphere may lead to heart problems and hearing loss, two problems that frequently affect firefighters. If you have any questions on CO exposure, please feel free to contact the UFA Health and Safety office at 212-545-6965 for additional information.

Carbon Monoxide Level (in atmosphere; parts per million)	Signs and Symptoms
10	No symptoms
70	Difficulty breathing with vigorous exercise; possibly mild headache across forehead
120	Difficulty breathing with moderate exercise; possibly throbbing headache in temple area
220	Headache; irritable; easily-fatigued; poor judgment; possible dizziness; poor vision
350-420	Headache, confusion; fainting with exertion
800-1220	Possible seizures, unconsciousness, respiratory failure; death if continued exposure
1950	Rapidly fatal

Shhhh.....The Big "C"

It is every firefighter's worst nightmare: to be told that you have Cancer. Your head races in many different directions for answers to the how, why and what's next.

I would like to start out by telling all our members that prevention is the biggest factor in avoiding Cancer. Whether it is a proper diet, staying in shape, keeping your personal protective gear clean, or showering after every job, it can go a long way to prevent ever having to contemplate the above questions.

There are many problems when dealing with Cancer. For one, there is no single test to tell you whether you have Cancer or not. Rather, it is up to the individual to have regular medical check ups and to know when something is going wrong with his body. If you recognize that something has changed, do not wait to seek medical advice from your health care provider. Certain positive tests will lead to further testing to pinpoint the problem and to help determine a proper course of action.

The UFA Health and Safety Office has sent to the field graphic charts from a 2008 *Time Magazine* article that illustrate various Cancers. This is to help every firefighter understand the nuances of individual Cancers and the signs to watch for. It also illustrates various treatments and the current prognosis for each Cancer. It is important to understand and realize that there are constant improvements being made in Cancer treatment due to ongoing research. The Health and Safety Office also has other information available on other various types of cancer and possible symptoms. This information is available at every union meeting or you can request it by calling or emailing us. We will be happy to send the information to you or your firehouse.

Thanks to our grant funding, we also have a nurse practitioner from Memorial Sloan Kettering Hospital, Ms. Erin Fusco, who visits firehouses with the UFA Health and Safety Field Rep, Tony Caracciolo to discuss Cancer prevention and treatment, and answer any questions that our firefighters may have. Her discussions have proved invaluable to our members' understanding of Cancer.

The New York City PICA plan is the plan that helps our members cover their extremely expensive prescription costs. There are deductibles and copays involved with this program. It is also important to understand that once you become Medicare eligible (usually after 2 years of being on Social Security Disability), you will no longer have the PICA program available to you. This is one of the reasons that it is very important for all our members to have the Catastrophic Disability Insurance (we hope that by the time this goes to print, it will once more be available for new members) or AFLAC Cancer policy, both of which are available through payroll deductions.

Starting in 2012, in New York, health plans must now cover the cost of certain prescriptions related to Cancers. How each individual health plan will accomplish this, and the associated ramifications have not been made clear as of this writing. You should contact your health plan for additional information as to your rights.

Anyone who finds himself in the unenviable position of being told he has Cancer can always avail himself to our Counseling Service Unit (CSU). You will also have the ability to use the counseling services provided by your health care provider, or a firefighter-friendly group, such as Friends of Firefighters (718-643-0980) or Firefighters Cancer Support Network (866-994-3276).

Information and support are crucial to anyone facing a cancer diagnosis or fighting cancer. The UFA's web site, under Health and Safety, has a listing of "Support Services Available". This listing includes firefighter resources as well as general Cancer resources, such as prescription and transportation help and assistance. Please make certain any firefighter or family member you know with Cancer has this all-important information available to him.

Anytime you find yourself dealing with an individual with Cancer, it is extremely important to realize that there is never a one-size-fits-all approach. You need to understand that these individuals are struggling with how best to come to grips with what he has found out and what the future holds in store for him and his family. He may want company. He might want to be left alone. It is important to respect the individual's wishes and let him know that you will always be there for him if and when needed, and that he will never be alone!

Line-of-Duty Injury Bills

If you are transported to the hospital for a LODI, it is important that you not provide the hospital with your personal address. Please provide the hospital with the address to 9 Metrotech for proper billing. However, despite this, occasionally, the hospital system MAY have your personal address on file due to personal visits to physicians and other healthcare needs. In this case, they may send you a bill for the services. If this happens, it is very important that you do not ignore this bill! This may result in the bill ending up with a collection service,. Even though you are not personally responsible for bills associated with a LODI, this may still end up adversely impacting your credit rating.

If you receive a bill in your name, please submit the bill to the Health and Safety Office with the CD-72 from your injury. You can fax it to us at 212-683-4768. The Bureau of Health Services has informed us that there is a four-year statute of limitations on paying all bills associated with LODIs. It is therefore crucial not to ignore these bills and send them to us promptly. We will work with BHS to ensure that the bill is paid.

If the bill has reached collections, you will receive a letter from BHS stating that the bill was not your responsibility. You MUST send this letter to the various credit bureaus to ensure that they are aware you were never responsible for this bill. Do not wait until you try to apply for a mortgage or new loan to discover that an old LODI bill is incorrectly on your credit report. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us.

Stay Well and Stay Safe!

Uniformed Firefighters Association

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