

# Health & Safety Office Update

## Uniformed Firefighters Association

### UFA Health & Safety Office

As we approach the New Year, the Health and Safety Office would like to wish everyone a happy and safe 2011 for their family and friends! Please remember that celebrating safely is the best way to enjoy the winter season with your loved ones.

Health and Safety Officer/Sergeant-At-Arms Bill Romaka would also like to thank all the present and retired members who have shown their support for "Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act." Many members visited Washington D.C. on a number of bus trips to influence Congressional leaders. Their dedication is greatly appreciated!

Health and Safety Officer/Sergeant-At-Arms Bill Romaka remains committed towards working for the safety of the membership. Currently, he participates in the some of the following committees: UFA/UFOA Safety Committee, NYS Professional Firefighters Fallen Firefighters Memorial Wall Committee, FDNY Apparatus Committee, IAFF Health and Safety Committee, NYS Professional Firefighters Health and Safety Committee, WTC Medical Monitoring and Treatment Steering Committee, The 9/11 Worker Protection-Task Force (representing UFA President Steve Cassidy), and the WTC Analytic Methods Workgroup.

If you need to contact the Health and Safety Officer, he may be reached at (212) 545-6964 or [bromaka@ufanyc.org](mailto:bromaka@ufanyc.org).



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The Health and Safety Office also includes the Program Manager/Grant Director Bernadette Royce. She was a firefighter/paramedic for Osceola County Fire Rescue in Florida and is currently working on her Master of Public Health degree. She oversees the Department of Labor Hazard Abatement Grant and can assist you in questions concerning health and safety. She may be reached at (212) 545-6965 or [broyce@ufanyc.org](mailto:broyce@ufanyc.org)

Tony Caracciolo is the Field Representative. He is a retired FDNY firefighter. Tony provides training in a number of firefighter health and safety issues at firehouses. He can also assist you in any questions concerning health and safety matters. Tony may be reached at (212) 545-6562 or [tcaracciolo@ufanyc.org](mailto:tcaracciolo@ufanyc.org).

The entire staff of the Health and Safety Office remains dedicated to providing you with the information you need to perform your job safely. The Health and Safety Office offers a wide variety of pamphlets on various health and safety needs. The website also provides additional information. Please contact us for any assistance! Stay Well and Stay Safe!

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## Poison Ivy

During this past brushfire season, there have been several cases of poison ivy. Contact with the plant's oil results in a painful rash and blisters. Indirect contact may occur from plant oil on clothing or gear. A reaction normally occurs eight to fifteen hours after contact. However, it may take up to five to fifteen days after contact with the oil if this is your first exposure.

If you are fighting a brush fire in an area where poison ivy is seen or suspected, it is crucial that you document a potential exposure. Obviously, poison ivy may occur from an exposure on or off duty. You should always take appropriate precautions to protect yourself from poison ivy whenever you are outside and in an area where poison ivy may be growing. If you are exposed to it on the job, you may not develop a rash until past the deadline for filing a CD-73. The difference between a LOD exposure and a non-LOD exposure will be having the proper CD-73 filed before the deadline. If your gear is exposed to poison ivy, you need to send it for decon to remove the oils. Mark on the gear that it has been exposed to poison ivy so others are aware. If you do see poison ivy, notify the officer on duty so precautions may be taken to protect yourself and others.



## Back Health

Chronic lower back pain is a common complaint for many Americans. The lower back suffers frequently as it bears the majority of the body's weight. Poor posture, improper body mechanics, poor muscle development and excess weight all contribute to lower back pain. However, firefighters must contend with additional stresses on the lower back. They must carry up to 130lbs of gear and frequently work in positions that do not favor proper body mechanics. Together these factors result in significant risk to your back.

Back injuries account for a significant portion of line of duty injuries and disabilities for firefighters. These injuries can result in a severe amount of pain for those who suffer from them. With this in mind, it is crucial to take proper care of your back! This also requires that you properly fill out a CD-72 in a timely manner if you injure or suspect you injured your back.

The lower back region can sustain any number of injuries. Some of the more common injuries include herniated discs, bulging discs, strained muscles, or sprains to the ligaments. Spinal nerves may also suffer from compression, which frequently is a source of pain or numbness. The best thing for lower back injuries remains prevention!

Aerobic exercise will increase your overall conditioning and help prevent back injuries. It will also keep off extra weight, a common cause of lower back pain. Strength building exercises that build the core strength of the body will also help, provided they are done properly. Lift correctly. It is understandable that in this job, firefighters often find themselves stressing their bodies due to the difficulties of various situations. Do not stress your body and your back when you can avoid it. Use proper body mechanics at every opportunity and avoid the risk of a repetitive stress injury to your lower back. Take care of your body as best you can and you should have a long, healthy career and retirement!

## Firehouse Mold

The Health and Safety Office often receives questions and calls concerning mold in the firehouses. Some forms of mold do present a risk to your health and safety. Mold predominantly causes respiratory problems and allergies. If you believe that you have been exposed to mold, you should protect yourself by completing a CD-73.

Small sections of mold can be decontaminated with a 1:10 bleach solution. Since bleach is caustic to the skin, be careful to avoid contact with it. If there are large sections of mold discovered, report it to the officer on duty so a report can be filed. If there are any water leaks, they also should be reported immediately to help prevent the formation of mold in the future.

## Cancer: Recognize the Risk And Protect Yourself!

Cancer. It's a potential risk of the job no one wants to recognize. Rather, it's easier to pretend the possibility doesn't exist. But denial doesn't make the threat of a diagnosis disappear.

Cancer remains a risk of firefighting and firefighters must learn to recognize cancer if it happens to them. They must also learn how to lower their risk of developing cancer through proper safety precautions, exercise and diet.

Certain cancers occur in firefighters more frequently than the general population. The job exposes firefighters to a wide variety of carcinogens (cancer-causing substances), such as benzene, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), diesel exhaust, formaldehydes, and asbestos, just to name a few. These cumulative exposures may increase your risk for cancer. So what can you do to take control of your health? Plenty!

After any job, you need to shower. When you sweat, your pores open up and potentially allow carcinogens to enter your body. Smoke is full of carcinogens. If you can smell it on your skin, hair and clothes, you are still exposing yourself to them. Get into the shower and wash them off! The less exposure time, the better! Your gear protects you from many of these carcinogens. But you need to take care of your gear as well. If your gear is dirty, it's contaminated. Clean the dirt from your gear after a job. If you can't spot clean it, send it for decon.

Now, let's talk about a sacred subject among firefighters: helmets. Yes, firefighters cherish helmets that show just how many jobs they went to and how many years they have on the job. This means cleaning is often a no-no. Yet, firefighters have a higher risk of brain cancer than the average population. While tradition dies hard in the fire service, tragically, firefighters also die; many times of preventable diseases, like cancer

So, you need to take a shower, wash you gear, and yes, unfortunately, clean your helmet (including the inside!). What else can you do? Exercise. People who exercise have lower risks of cancer overall. Eat fruits and vegetables in lots of different colors. The more colors of fruits and vegetables you eat, the more antioxidants you ingest. Antioxidants may protect your body from free radicals that damage your cells and can promote the beginnings of cancer-growth.

But, you should recognize the signs and symptoms of cancer should it occur. There are many types of cancer and each has its own signs and symptoms. The general signs and symptoms are unexplained weight loss, fatigue, fever, pain, night sweats, skin changes on a mole (skin cancer), nagging cough, or trouble swallowing. Prostate cancer strikes a large number of firefighters. This causes difficult or painful urination, the inability to urinate, blood in urine, pain with ejaculation, lower back pain, excessive urination at night, and bone pain or tenderness. If you have these or any other unusual signs or symptoms, seek a professional medical evaluation immediately.

Posters of the various types of cancers are available at the UFA Health and Safety Office for your firehouse. If your firehouse does not have one and you would like one, please call the Health and Safety Office at (212)- 545-6965. Erin Fusco, a Nurse Practitioner, also provides lectures on cancers specific for firefighters as part of the Health and Safety Grant.

## Cardiac Concerns

It's your day off, you're kicking back with some friends, watching some football, drinking some beers. Suddenly you feel a dull pressure in the center of your chest and you can't catch your breath. You keep quiet, not wanting to ruin everyone's fun. Besides, you figure it's probably just all the pizza and wings; it'll go away. After a few minutes, the pain continues down your left arm and into your jaw. You feel sick to your stomach as a cold sweat breaks across your forehead. It is harder to breathe and the chest pressure worsens. This isn't heartburn.

This, unfortunately, happens to many Americans since heart disease is the number one killer of Americans. It also kills many firefighters. It may not happen as described above though. Heart attacks present in a number of ways. The classic symptom is chest pain, often described as dull, squeezing, or pressure-like that moves into the jaw and down one or both arms. It may also extend into the upper back and upper abdominal area. Sometimes a heart attack causes difficulty breathing, with or without chest pain. Other times, there will not be these "classic" symptoms of a heart attack. A person may just feel weak, tired, get sweaty for no reason or pass out. Nausea and vomiting are also associated with cardiac episodes. The important thing is to realize that not all heart attacks cause chest pain. If there is any doubt that a person is having a heart attack, call 911 and go to an emergency department for an evaluation. If you are on the job and you develop any of these signs and symptoms, notify your officer immediately and seek medical assistance. Firefighters face a much greater risk of dying from heart disease during fire suppression, so recognize the possibility and take steps to deal with it. When dealing with cardiac problems, time is crucial!

However, prevention is also crucial. Firefighters must realize that the risk of dying from heart disease is significant and take steps to combat it. You can't change some risks. Heart disease risk increases with age. Certain races, such as African-Americans, also face increased risk. Males are more likely to suffer from heart disease. Family history also plays a significant part in determining your risk of heart disease, so learn as much as you can about your family history. If you are at increased risk, it remains even more crucial to seek regular checkups.

There are risks you can change though and this is where prevention plays a part. Regular checkups can help health care providers recognize when a person is at risk of a heart attack. Changes in diet can lower a person's cholesterol and blood pressure. Eating less saturated fats, eating more Omega-3 fatty acids, increasing the amounts of fruits and vegetables and insoluble fiber in your diet may all help reduce the risk of heart disease. Obviously, smoking is a risk that needs to be avoided at all possible costs! Do not start or if you are a smoker, quit! If you need professional help to quit, get it. Regular aerobic exercise also reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease. Medications may reduce the risks of high cholesterol and hypertension.

Make whatever changes you can in your life to reduce your risk of heart disease. Each healthy meal, each cigarette skipped, and each hour spent exercising are all steps in the right direction! Firefighting as a career increases your risk of developing heart disease. Therefore, it is even more vital to work to prevent it. It is also important to recognize the signs and symptoms of heart disease. Time is of crucial importance when a person experiences a heart attack. Don't deny the symptoms; seek help immediately!

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 issues as part of the Health and Safety Office Grant. For an appointment with Lt. Brown, he can be reached at (516) 496-7900 (Nassau Office) or (631) 4221-5885 (Suffolk Office).

## Take Care of Yourself First!

No one could ever deny that firefighting is a stressful job. While some people thrive on the stress, sometimes, the stress takes its toll. Unfortunately, the FDNY has seen more than its fair share of self-harming behavior from stress and PTSD. Some stress is fine; but recognize if it negatively affects your life and your relationships. Ask for help at this point. There is nothing wrong with admitting that you need help. You can't take care of others if you aren't taking care of yourself!

Stress can help your body respond to threats and extreme situations. However, when poorly managed, it puts a tremendous strain on your body and mind and can harm your health. Signs of poorly managed stress include fatigue, muscle tension, headaches, gastrointestinal issues, anxiety and mood changes. With proper techniques, stress can be managed effectively so it does not interfere with your life, career, and relationships.

Most individuals suffer from depression at some point. It can cause fatigue, loss of appetite, overeating, insomnia, or the desire to sleep a lot. Individuals feel pessimistic and no longer enjoy previously pleasurable activities. The person feels persistently sad and may think of harming him or herself. If you are thinking of hurting yourself or others, seek professional help immediately!

PTSD can develop after a severe exposure to a psychological trauma. It normally begins within three months of the experience, but this can vary. This disorder can be quite crippling in how it affects the individual. The signs and symptoms of PTSD are listed in the chart below. If you believe you suffer from PTSD, seek help from a trained professional.

Substance abuse may occur on its own or as part of any of these problems. If you believe you have a substance abuse problem, or others tell you that you have a substance abuse problem, seek help for it. Do not wait until it destroys your life and your career. There is nothing wrong with seeking help for any problem. There are lots of places to go for help. You can find a list of places on our website at [http://www.ufanyc.org/health\\_and\\_safety/counseling.php](http://www.ufanyc.org/health_and_safety/counseling.php). Remember, if you aren't taking care of yourself first, you can't take care of the ones who depend upon you.

### PTSD Signs and Symptoms

Intrusive Memories	Avoidance and Numbing	Anxiety and Increased Startle Response
Flashbacks or reliving the event	Avoiding thinking or talking about the event	Irritability or anger
Dreaming about the event	Feeling numb	Guilt or shame
Frequent memories about the event	Avoiding activities you previously enjoyed	Self-destructive behavior, e.g. drinking or drugs
Feeling distress when discussing event	Difficulty keeping close relationships	Being easily startled

## UFA Goal: Zero Accidents!

As procedures change, it becomes increasingly important to remember that a safe response to all scenes is crucial. The modified response plan recently implemented in the Queens Borough forces responding units to change the normal response patterns practiced for years. Due to the increase in building inspections, companies are more likely to respond out of sequence from their normal response patterns. All of these changes in response patterns increase the possibility for a collision to occur! Please respond with due caution at all times!

When responding to any calls, please keep in mind that speed can result in tragedy. Yes, time is crucial in this job; however, being injured on the way to a scene won't help anyone! The overall goal is to arrive at the scene quickly and safely, not fast!

When a call comes in, the chauffer should verify that he fully understands the nature of the call and should function accordingly. If the company is on a Building Inspection, the chauffer should notify the dispatcher that the company will be delayed because of the Building Inspection Safety Program (BISP). The company members should be careful not to rush into traffic when returning to the apparatus. When returning to the apparatus, it is important to put on all of your personal protective equipment (PPE) before proceeding to get on the rig and heading to the call. Because the company will be responding out of sequence, it is critical to take extra precautions to avoid any other unexpected Department apparatus responding from the field.

The modified response plan may also result in encountering unexpected apparatus. If the first due company requests that the other incoming units upgrade their response, this may result in various units arriving out-of-sequence than normally expected due to traffic patterns or being out of quarters. Expect the unexpected and be prepared!

As the New Year begins, it becomes even more important that our chauffeurs step up to ensure a safe response! With the current budget climate, and the possibility of closures or brownouts, members will be traveling longer distances to fires and emergencies. We are also finishing up the year with the most emergency responses in our history. This inexcusable "doing more with less" has a finite point that the government bureaucrats don't seem to understand the consequences of! Chauffeurs have to understand and resist the notion that they "have to make up time" as the distances may be longer, units may be responding out of sequence and they may be in unfamiliar areas on a steady basis. The chauffeurs' main responsibility is getting our members to and from the emergency safely, and there is no reason that this focus should not be taken with all the seriousness that it deserves!

Remember intersections are the most dangerous place. State law mandates that all emergency vehicles must stop at red lights and stop signs and wait for other drivers to give you the right of way before proceeding. At all times, you are expected to drive with due regard for the safety of others. If you are involved in a collision, the department may cover your legal fees. However, if you were not driving with due regard for the safety of others, the department may not cover your fees. This may result in significant financial costs to you and could have a tremendous impact on your home life and personal finances. Also, remember that there are even more serious concerns than just financial ones. There is the very real possibility that you might seriously harm or kill someone. While we need to make sure that all our members go home safely, we also need to make sure that all the citizens whose paths we cross go home safely. First responders have been held criminally responsible in the death of a civilian involved in a collision with an emergency vehicle. The punishments have ranged from probation to jail time.

The message cannot be clearer! A safe and proper response at all times is the first priority!

## Health and Safety Grant Provides Additional Training

Health and Safety Officer/Sergeant-At-Arms Bill Romaka is pleased to announce that the Health and Safety Office received a health and safety grant for \$94,594 from the New York State Department of Labor Hazard Abatement Board. The grant period runs from August 1, 2010 to July 31, 2011. The grant money is used for a variety of expenses. It is used to partially offset the expenses of the salaries of the Grant Director and Field Safety Representative. The grant covers training at the firehouses for the firefighters in a variety of topics including risk assessment, stress/PTSD, strains/sprains, burns, heat/cold stress, noise/vibration, back injuries, smoke inhalation, and wound/cut prevention. Health and Safety Field Representative Tony Caracciolo conducts this training at firehouses. Furthermore, Lt. Rob Brown, a Physician Assistant, and Erin Fusco, a Nurse Practitioner, provide additional training in heart disease and cancer.

The UFA has been involved in occupational and safety training and educational programs since it began in 1917. Since then, the UFA has been involved in asbestos screenings in NYC firefighters, studies that helped pass the Heart Bill in 1967, the Cancer Bill in 1993 and the Infectious Disease Bill in 2000. In 2004, the UFA worked with Cornell University on a Study on the Traumatic Stress, Workplace Conditions and Well-Being of NYC Firefighters.

The UFA remains dedicated towards working for improved health and safety conditions for NYC firefighters. The Health and Safety grant provides for a number of publications on health and safety issues related to firefighting. If you would like any information on firefighter health and safety issues to be sent to your firehouse or for your personal use, please call the Health and Safety office at (212) 545-6965. If you would like to schedule training at your firehouse or a risk assessment of your firehouse, please call the Field Safety Representative at (212) 545-6562.

## Rehab Before the Alarm!

It doesn't matter if it's the dog days of summer or the coldest day of December, rehab remains a crucial concept in the fire service. Firefighters burn too many calories too quickly and exhaust their fluid reserves in a matter of minutes at a structure fire. Providing your body with nutrients to replenish the lost fluids and electrolytes must be a priority at a fire scene.

However, rehab remains more than just replacing the lost fluids. By using the word "rehab", we naturally focus on what happens after the fact. We should focus on it as an ongoing process to improve physical fitness and hydration status overall. This can't happen after a firefighter has already fought a fire. Rehab must focus on preventing heat stress and fatigue and reducing cardiac workload. A firefighter must go to the job with plenty of fluid in his system to prevent heat and cardiac stress! A firefighter's fitness level and hydration level prior to a fire determines his levels of cardiac and heat stress during the fire. Even moderate levels of dehydration prior to a fire can result in severe cardiovascular stress, regardless of fitness level. Sudden cardiovascular collapse is the leading cause of firefighter deaths. Don't arrive at a fire dehydrated, ready for your body to be stressed more than required. "Rehab" needed to start before the alarm rang!

When fighting a fire, your body needs to be cooled. Cooling your body takes stress off your heart and the heat sensors in your body. "Dress down" when possible. Rest periods and cooling will release heat and allow the core body temperature to return to normal. Use medical monitoring to ensure your vital signs are within safe limits. Drink plenty of fluids to replace what you have lost. Pushing yourself to the point of fatigue and injury on a job where there is little to benefit from it is not worth the risk. Remember, you need to recover from this alarm and get ready for the next one!

# Always Wear Your PPE!

The UFA Health and Safety Office cannot stress enough to always wear all of your PPE and to wear it correctly. There have been several fires recently where the firefighter may have sustained life-threatening burns if he had not been wearing his PPE properly. Please check your PPE regularly and make sure that you are taking proper care of your PPE. If you note any concerns with your PPE, notify the officer-on-duty immediately! If your PPE needs to be sent for decon, please inspect your backup gear thoroughly. Please call the Health and Safety Office with any questions or concerns regarding PPE.

## Firehouse Repairs Information

Often, members contact the Health and Safety Office regarding safety issues related to their firehouses. These issues include plumbing problems, sewage issues, broken Nedermans, maintenance concerns, and rodent infestation. Any time there is an issue related to the firehouse, you must first notify the officer on duty. The Officer should then call the Resource Center at 718-999-4357 (Monday to Friday, 7AM to 3PM, after hours for emergency only.) The Officer will be

given a work order number. After allowing a reasonable amount of time, the Officer may follow up with the Resource Center to determine when the situation will be addressed or what needs to be done to correct the problem.

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

### Uniformed Firefighters Association

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