



FIREFIGHTERS AND CANCER

POSITION

According to NIOSH, of the approximately 50,000 deaths from cancer in the United States each year, 4% (20,000) are related to exposures in the workplace. Firefighters have distinct occupational hazards, including exposure to substances in gaseous form that are cancer-causing agents. Because of this, Firefighters are more prone than the general occupation to develop cancer.

EXPOSURE

A substantial body of literature now exists on the carcinogenic hazards of firefighting. Cancers can be linked with specific toxic and carcinogenic chemical exposures to which Firefighters are exposed in the course of their occupation. Over 70 organic agents were repeatedly identified in smoke at multiple fires. The known carcinogens in smoke include: carbon monoxide, benzene, hydrogen chloride, nitrogen dioxide, isocyanates, and acrolein.

Firefighters are routinely exposed to many products of combustion, smoke, gas, and toxic chemicals. It is likely that fire smoke contains additional carcinogens beyond the known ones identified to date. Other known carcinogens that Firefighters are exposed to include: asbestos, diesel exhaust, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs).

EVIDENCE

There is sufficient scientific evidence that demonstrates Firefighters, by occupation have a higher mortality rate and shortened life expectancy for cancers compared to other occupational illnesses and injuries. These studies clearly indicate that cancer is linked to the occupational employment of a Firefighter due to the exposure of smoke, fumes, carcinogens, poisonous, toxic or chemical substances which occur on the job.

Scientists don't define cancer as a single disease, but as a broad term encompassing 200 diseases found in distinct body sites. Studies have shown that Firefighters have an excess cancer rate compared to the general population.

Significant evidence indicates that Firefighters have:

- 2 times the incidence for brain cancer
- 2 times the incidence for liver cancer
- 2.8 times the incidence for colon and rectal cancer
- 2.5 - 3 times the incidence for bladder cancer
- a higher incidence for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- a higher incidence for urinary cancer

Plausible evidence suggest Firefighters are at increased risk for:

- stomach cancer
- prostate cancer
- skin cancer



AGREEMENT

Worker's Compensation boards generally have established a history of identifying cancer in Firefighters as an employment related activity. The California Public Employee retirement System is the largest retirement system in the United States and they have stated that the addition of a presumptive cancer benefit for Firefighters has had a minimal effect on actuarial costs to their system (average claim is \$14,000). Illinois adopted presumptive cancer legislation 1984 and found no significant actuarial impact. In Oklahoma, claims for cancer averaged only \$10,000 per claim.

In addition, 22 states, New York City, Canada and New Zealand have adopted legislation that presumes that if a Firefighter contracts cancer, it is occupationally induced. Presumptive cancer legislation does not automatically give benefits to a Firefighter who has cancer. Due to changes initiated by the IRS, states with presumptive cancer laws also have a system of rebuttal. After the diagnosis of cancer is made, it is up to the employer to demonstrate lifestyles or other factors that put the cancer outside of the occupation.

2007, HOUSE BILL 301

Firefighters have distinct occupational hazards, including exposure to substances in gaseous form that are cancer-causing agents. The cancer presumptive laws have worked in New York City, 22 states, Canada, and New Zealand. Firefighters should be educated as to the hazards of their occupation. Currently a bill is presented to the Florida legislature that would provide for Cancer Presumption for Florida's Firefighters (House Bill 301). Additional information is available through the Firefighter Cancer Foundation – www.ffcancer.org and Local 2928 – www.iaff2928.com