

Impact of Occupational Cancer



Establish a comprehensive firefighter cancer strategy that invests in research, provides access to cancer screening for firefighters, and reduces and eliminates PFAS exposure.

Issue

Firefighters have a 9% higher risk of developing cancer and a 14% higher risk of dying from cancer compared to the general public.

Impact Areas

Research

Greater investment in research will expand our understanding of the mechanisms between occupational exposures and cancer, why firefighters are at heightened risk from some cancers, and to better understand the cancer risks of our under-studied populations, including women and minorities.

Access to cancer screenings

Preventive screenings can identify cancer in its earliest stages when positive treatment outcomes are more likely. However, it remains difficult for individual firefighters to receive early screenings as current screening guidance does not account for their occupational exposures. Revised screening guidance can help medical professionals and insurance companies understand the need to screen firefighters based on their higher cancer risk.

Reduce and eliminate PFAS exposures

PFAS are likely carcinogenic chemicals that degrade very slowly, earning the label "forever chemicals." PFAS are found in a firefighter's blood, their firehouses, some firefighting foams, and perhaps most concerning, bunker gear. These chemicals are intensifying exposures, even though it is coming from the very gear meant to protect firefighters. Next-generation PPE can remove this risk.

CANCER RESEARCH

Fire Fighter Routes of Cancer Exposure

- Inhalation**
From breathing contaminants due to not wearing a SCBA, or to ill-fitting or defective SCBA
- Absorption**
From contaminants going through, around, or under gear and contacting the skin
- Ingestion**
From touching contaminated gear and not washing hands properly

Fire Service: Increase training and education about safe work practices to reduce cancer exposures.

More Information

