

Fire Department Safety Officers Association

Support for the National Firefighter Registry (NFR)

There are many threats to firefighters' health as they go about doing their job. The work conditions include thermal assault and exposure to products of combustion that are toxic to humans. Despite progress made to protective clothing and other advances in the industry, firefighters remain at risk of many injuries associated with the work they do. Several studies show that firefighters' have an increased risk of cancer.⁽¹⁻³⁾ In 2022, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) completed their evaluation of the carcinogenicity of occupational exposure as a firefighter, which they have now classified as a group 1 *known human carcinogen*, based on sufficient evidence for cancer in firefighters for mesothelioma and bladder cancer. There was also limited evidence for several other cancers: colon, prostate, testicular, melanoma of the skin, and non-Hodgkin lymphoma.⁽⁴⁾

This evaluation is very important but does not remove the need to learn more about the specific cancer risks and the relationship of the occupational factors that contribute to the findings. The fire service in the United States is very diverse. In addition to career firefighters, there are volunteers and part-time paid personnel. In these categories are women and minorities. Further indicating differences are specialties that include fire investigators, wildland firefighters, fire instructors, and crash fire rescue (airport firefighters.)

In a proactive move, the U.S. Congress directed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to create the National Firefighter Registry (NFR). The NFR is a voluntary registry that will include all firefighters in the United States, not just those diagnosed with cancer. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) will lead the project on behalf of the CDC as they have the knowledge, expertise, experience, and resources to properly manage and administer this vital project. The goal is to better understand the link between firefighting and cancer in the United States.

The success of this program will depend upon broad participation from the fire service. With this commitment by the industry, the NFR will be able to:

- Track cancer diagnoses (including rare types of cancer) among a diverse group of firefighters throughout the U.S.
- Explore cancer risk between different groups of firefighters, including women, minorities, and sub-specialties of the fire service
- Evaluate how exposures, including those from large or unusual incidents, relate to firefighters' cancer risk
- Evaluate how control interventions relate to firefighters' cancer risk
- Investigate whether firefighters' risks for different cancers are changing over time

The Fire Department Safety Officers Association (FDSOA) strongly encourages all firefighters to participate including structural and wildland, career and volunteer, active and retired, and those with and without cancer. The FDSOA encourages its members and non-members to participate and asks them to encourage as many people as possible to enroll in the NFR. The success of the NFR is dependent upon participation from a broad and diverse population within the fire service.

The purpose of fire department safety officers is to work to make firefighters safer and healthier, not just while doing the job but well into retirement. Supporting the NFR will provide more information to the FDSOA that can be added to its training programs regarding the health risks that firefighters face. The end goal is to reduce the risk that firefighters face while working in environments with known carcinogens. The information will help all those working towards this goal including fire departments, standard-setting organizations, policy makers, and associations like the FDSOA.

The following is a list of actions that the FDSOA will support:

- Utilize its resources to advise its members that the NFR is open to ALL firefighters, not just those with cancer. This will include using all communication methods of the Association, its website, trainings, and conferences. Firefighters will be asked to enroll at <https://NFR.cdc.gov>.
- Promote the notion that all the information that is provided will be kept confidential.
- Let firefighters know that the process is simple and will take approximately 30 minutes or less.
- There will be opportunities for firefighters to participate in follow-up questionnaires. These will be important to better understand risk factors and further contribute to the research. These questionnaires are not necessary for firefighters to register but will be beneficial should they elect to participate.
- Request its members and those participating in FDSOA events and/or visiting its website to encourage others to participate. This would include retired or former fighters.
- More specific information can be found on the NFR website – www.cdc.gov/NFR.

Sources

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2. **Daniels, R.D., T.L. Kubale, J.H. Yiin. et al.:** Mortality and cancer incidence in a pooled cohort of US firefighters from San Francisco, Chicago and Philadelphia (1950-2009). *Occup Environ Med.* 71(6): 388-97 (2014).
3. **International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).:** Painting, Firefightings, and Shiftwork, IARC Monographs on the Evaluation of Carcinogenic Risks to Humans, vol.98. *Worth Health Organization.* Lyon, France (2010).
4. **Demers, P.A., D.M. Demarini, K.W. Fent, et al.:** Carcinogenicity of occupational exposure as a firefighter. *Lancet Oncol.* 23(10) 985-986 (2022).