

House Majority Policy Committee

Hearing on *Support for our Hometown Heros: Recruiting, training and retaining Emergency Responders*

August 31, 2022

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Cancer in the Fire Service

- Recruit & Retention should be Recruit, Retain and protect.
- To give some perspective to the above statement. The Adamsburg Station of the Hempfield Fire Department (which I belong to) has 6 Senior or older firefighters who have a total of 13 related persons in the Station.
- To keep fire- fighters we have to protect them
 - **Actively**
 - Gear
 - Hoods
 - Gloves
 - Boots
 - Helmets.
 - **Passively**
 - Report Keeping
 - Long Term
 - Clearing house for the State for firefighters

- 1986 – My Father Died at 57 years of age
 - Died of cancer from smoking however
 - I watched the effects and toll it took on me and my family

- Cancer in the Fire Service is real
 - 2016 Study from NIOSH, CDC and Dept. of Health and Human Service
 - US Rate of cancer vs firefighters indicates the firefighters suffer from high rates.
 - The saying in much of the Fire Service “FF Eat, Sleep and Breath fire” as a way of showing our dedication
 - Ironically – we have a higher rate than the general population
 - Oral
 - Digestive
 - Respiratory
 - Urinary
 - Twice as many FF as general Population
 - Suffer with Malignant mesothelioma
 - Rare cancer caused by **asbestos**
 - Exposure simply by doing their job
 - In Younger firefighters
 - More causes of certain cancers
 - Bladder
 - Prostate

- One of our stations FF suffered this already
- When we compare Firefighters in this study to each other
 - Chance of lung cancer diagnosis or death increases with amount of time spent at fires
 - Fire of yesterday not only burn hotter and faster due to:
 - Construction material of building materials
 - Composition of furnishing.
 - The chance of leukemia death increased with the number of fire runs
 - We know the fire service is getting busier
- This information is gathered from a study of FFs from Chicago, Philadelphia and San Francisco. From those department records the study ended up with 29,993 FF's
 - Death certs gathered
 - **Cancer Registry**
 - Types of cancers identified.
 - Assessed each firefighter's potential job exposure
 - Compared disease outcomes by various groups

Study was not without its limitations but with better record keeping such as

- **Call reports**
 - Who was exposed
 - Who wore masks etc.
 - We should make it easier or mandatory field to complete

- Some type of registry in Pa
 - To track firefighters
 - In the fire service
 - After they have left
 - For a period of years as I think we lack that ability in most of the state
 - This can all lead to way to help identify and predict potential cancers and hopefully.

Prevention measures.

- The Lavender Ribbon Report
 - Best Practices for Preventing Firefighter Cancer
 - 11 Best Practices
 - Full PPE, including SCBA including salvage and overhaul
 - Second hood for all personnel who are interior
 - Decon of those who exit fires
 - After gross decon, wipe exposed parts of firefighters
 - Change uniforms or street clothes
 - Shower
 - PPE not allowed outside of apparatus floor or to dirty room
 - Clean all touch points in rigs
 - Annual Physical
 - No tobacco or cigarettes on or off duty
 - Document all chemical or fire exposures.

(I might add a second set of gear to that list personally)

Only if we document all exposures, use modern cleaning machines along with a reporting system that forces us to document an FF duty, can we compare exposure and preventative steps taken to determine if it is working and thus continue to evolve to prevent cancer.

While we have machines, policy or procedure that can help us do our job, many are not obtainable for many Fire Departments and at some point, we need to seriously address this disparity.

Some of the equipment and gear include.

- Vehicle exhaust removal system
- Dirty and clean areas in the fire station
- 2 sets of gear so we can clean one and keep our FF in service
- 2 hoods
- 2 pair of gloves
- On scene decon
- Gear Cleaner
- Equipment Cleaner
- Station showers
- Station lockers for clean clothes
- Station washer and dryer for street clothes
- In station Air cylinder filling station

These items can help FF leave the station in a clean condition as they go about the rest of the day and not transfer harmful carcinogens to family, friends or other fire stations. This will also get our equipment

and gear cleaner with less touching. In the end not only do we clean and protect our Firefighters we get them back home sooner instead of spending sometimes more time cleaning than the actual fire. This will tend to retain people and have them answer more calls in the near time and long term.

I leave you with this thought: The costs, per Asbestos.com, from the Milliman Research Report of 2017, indicates the cost to treat the average prevalent and preventable cancers range from \$49,013.00 for skin cancer to \$282,000.00 for lung cancer which comes to an average cost of \$165,000.00. The basic cost of devices I had listed above is about \$115,000 (beyond the normal cost associated with being a firefighter). This cost would come to about \$5750.00 a member for 20 members. Prevention is cheaper, would you not agree.

Thank you for your patience and time to speak here today.