

Pregnancy and Firefighting

Women in the fire service, like all fire fighters, have concerns about their health and wellness. This includes health topics that are female specific, such as pregnancy. Data suggests that occupations having high constraints on childbearing, such as low benefits and lack of policies, can delay or limit childbearing among employees.¹ This is important to recognize as female fire fighters will need support to limit the physical and emotional stress of the job during these times.

Data indicates miscarriage rates of female firefighters who become pregnant while on the job are higher than the general population. In a study surveying 1,821 women fire fighters, it was reported that nearly a quarter of their first pregnancies while in the fire service ended in miscarriage and rates of pre-term delivery were also high among this population.¹

Some of the pregnancy risks associated with the occupation of firefighting include:

- Shift work impacts
- Circadian rhythm interruptions
- Exposure to high temperatures
- Loud noises (can impact fetus and cause low birth weights)
- Physical strain of firefighting
- Chemical exposures

In a study surveying occupational factors and miscarriages in the United States fire service, more than 30% of women reported that their departments did not have policies regarding employee pregnancies or maternity leave.²

Changes in policies and standards must be made by fire departments nationally. International Association of Women in Fire & Emergency Service (Women in Fire) estimates that only about half of fire departments in the United States and Canada have a pregnancy policy, and those that do often do not fully address issues surrounding pregnancies. Injury prevention and nursing accommodations are also some of the concerns female fire fighters feel should be addressed regarding pregnancy in the fire service.

More research is needed as female fire fighters and pregnancy in the fire service is grossly understudied.



Sources:

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2. Jung, A. M., Jahnke, S. A., Dennis, L. K., Bell, M. L., Burgess, J. L., Jitnarin, N., Kaipust, C. M., & Farland, L. V. (2021). Occupational factors and miscarriages in the US fire service: a cross-sectional analysis of women firefighters. *Environmental health: a global access science source*, 20(1), 116. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12940-021-00800-4>

