

SELF-ADVOCACY AND CANCER RISK REDUCTION



This factsheet was developed by the International Association of Fire Fighters and the Firefighter Cancer Support Network.

Changing the culture of the fire service can be challenging, time-consuming, and not easily accepted within your department. There is often push back to changes even if they promote the health of you and your brothers and sisters.

Therefore, it is important to advocate for yourself and your health throughout your career and through retirement. Here are some tips to keep in mind when self-advocating for cancer risk reduction:

- ✓ **ADVOCATE FOR YOURSELF.** To reduce exposures in the fire service, it is up to you to be proactive in health and safety efforts and to take responsibility for the choices you make both on and off the job.
- ✓ **ADVOCATE FOR YOUR WHY.** Identify your personal “WHY” or reason for taking responsibility for your health. This can be what is important to you, like your family, friends, accomplishing certain goals in your career, or having a long and healthy retirement. Having a solid and motivating “why” can help with the acceptance and discipline to follow best practices to reduce exposures both on and off the job.
- ✓ **ADVOCATE FOR REDUCING YOUR EXPOSURES.** It is a personal choice to advocate for yourself and be proactive to reduce your exposure to cancer-causing toxicants on the fire ground. Advocating to reduce exposures can look like:
 - Wearing your self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) through overhaul.
 - Performing preliminary exposure reduction (PER) after every fire.
 - Using wet wipes to clean all exposed skin areas after a fire.
 - Showering within the hour upon returning to the fire station.
- ✓ **ADVOCATE FOR YOUR HEALTH.** Early cancer detection is critical in increasing survival and improving outcomes. It is important to adhere to annual medical evaluations and recommended cancer screenings. Make sure to:
 - Be proactive in scheduling your NFPA 1582 annual medical evaluations and cancer screenings by following up with department physicians or your primary care provider (PCP).
 - Take action and get checked if/when you do not feel like yourself.
 - Communicate with your PCP on the occupational risks you face as a fire fighter so they can better treat and advocate for your health.
- ✓ **ADVOCATE FOR CULTURE CHANGE.** It is important to lead by example to promote culture change within your department. Your behavior can help encourage and motivate other crew members and officers to make a change within the department:
 - Not wearing dirty gear as a sign of experience but instead performing preliminary exposure reduction (PER) after every fire.
 - Not encouraging certain behaviors that may increase exposure to carcinogens for the sake of tradition but adopting necessary changes to reduce exposures on the fire ground, back at the station, and off duty.
 - Push for strong standard operating procedures around cancer reduction efforts both on the fire ground and at the station.

