

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
FIRE FIGHTERS

SUICIDE PREVENTION
STAND DOWN WEEK
TOOLKIT

September 18-23, 2023



www.iaff.org/behavioral-health

SUICIDE PREVENTION STAND DOWN WEEK

To protect and promote the behavioral health of IAFF members, open conversations about fire fighter mental health, coping with personal and occupational stress, and suicide prevention are essential. To elevate these important conversations throughout the IAFF membership, **the IAFF is instituting a Suicide Prevention Stand Down the week of Sept. 18-23, 2023, in recognition of National Suicide Prevention Month.**

WHY IS THE IAFF HAVING A SUICIDE PREVENTION STAND DOWN?

Over the past few years, many IAFF Locals have participated in various safety stand downs, positively impacting thousands of IAFF members across Canada and the United States. The goal of an IAFF Suicide Prevention Stand Down is to:

- raise awareness of suicide in the fire service
- educate IAFF members on suicide risk factors and warning signs
- connect members to available behavioral health resources
- promote social connection
- increase help-seeking behavior

By encouraging Locals and fire departments to participate in a Suicide Prevention Stand Down, the IAFF hopes to reduce the number of suicides in the fire service and enhance the overall behavioral health of our sisters and brothers.

An IAFF Suicide Prevention Stand Down also provides each Local and fire department the opportunity to discuss safety policies, behavioral health goals, and resources available to their members.

To kick off the weeklong IAFF Suicide Prevention Stand Down, the IAFF will host a webinar on September 18, "Suicide and Suicide Prevention in the Fire Service." Please join in the IAFF's efforts to understand fire fighter suicide and learn what you can do to help.

WHO CAN BE INVOLVED IN THE IAFF SUICIDE PREVENTION STAND DOWN?

Any Local/fire department can host an IAFF Suicide Prevention Stand Down in their respective municipalities throughout September 2023 and beyond. Locals/fire departments can provide focused discussions on topics such as suicide prevention, recognizing the risks factors and warning signs of suicide, and where to find resources and assistance. **IAFF Locals/ fire departments can take advantage of the suggested five-day action plan offered in this toolkit.**

It is important for Peer Support teams, Local affiliate leaders, fire department administration, and health and wellness personnel to identify local resources available to members, such as your local peer support team or Employee Assistance Program (EAP), as well as national resources, like the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, IAFF Center of Excellence, and Edgewood Health Network (EHN).

CONNECT ONLINE

IAFF Locals, IAFF Peer Support teams, IAFF members, and fire administrations can follow the IAFF on [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#). The IAFF encourages members to post a message about suicide in the fire service, using #SuicideSafetyStandDown2023 and tag the IAFF at @IAFFOfficial to show support to our brothers and sisters and help promote awareness of fire fighter suicide.

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WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT FIRE FIGHTER SUICIDE?

While the rate of fire fighter suicide is unknown, we know that too many fire fighters die by suicide each month. Research tells us that fire fighters experience higher rates of certain behavioral health disorders, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and alcohol use disorder. These behavioral health disorders increase the risk of suicide for anyone, including fire fighters.

SUICIDE STATISTICS IN THE GENERAL POPULATION

- The CDC has reported 48,183 Americans died by suicide in 2021.
- Suicide is among the top 9 leading causes of death in the United States for people aged 10-64.
- In 2021, an estimated 12.3 million American adults seriously thought about suicide and 1.7 million people attempted Suicide.
- 11 people die by suicide every day in Canada.

SUICIDE STATISTICS IN THE FIRE SERVICE

- Fire fighters represent an occupational group at increased suicide risk (Stanley et. al., 2018).
- In a convenience sample study conducted in 2015, fire fighters were found to have higher rates of suicide ideation, plans, and attempts when compared rates of the general population. This sample included 1,027 current and retired U.S. fire fighters (Stanley, et. al., 2015).
 - Suicidal ideation 46.8% (fire fighters) vs 13.5% (general U.S. population)
 - Suicide plans 19.2% (fire fighters) vs 3.9% (general U.S population)
 - Suicide attempts 15.5 % (fire fighters) vs 4.6% (general U.S population)
- In a national sample of fire fighters, current post-traumatic stress symptoms were found to be associated with 5.2% higher odds of attempting suicide during their firefighting careers (Boffa et al., 2017).
- In a survey conducted in 2022 by Warriors Research Institute (COMBUST: COVID Occupational Measures of Burnout and Understaffed Teams), 8,263 IAFF members responded. Of those respondents, 37.9% indicated a history of suicidal ideation and/or intent:
 - It was a brief passing thought: 27.3%
 - I have had a plan at least once to kill myself but did not try to do it: 6.1%
 - I have had a plan at least once to kill myself and really wanted to die: 3%
 - I have attempted to kill myself, but did not want to die: 0.7%
 - I have attempted to kill myself, and really hoped to die: 0.8%

SUICIDE PREVENTION STAND DOWN WEEK

A CALL TO ACTION: WHAT CAN YOU DO?



We can all help prevent fire fighter suicide through **awareness, education, connection, and action**. Below is a five-day action plan for a suicide prevention stand down that can be enacted in your community, IAFF Local, or fire department.

A FIVE-DAY SUICIDE PREVENTION STAND DOWN

Monday, Sept. 18: Tune in to Learn

- Tune in from 12:30-2:00 p.m. (EST) and join us for free live webinar: [“Suicide and Suicide Prevention in the Fire Service.”](#) This discussion will provide a fresh look at suicide in the fire service, explore best practices on suicide prevention and postvention, explore a five-step evidence-based suicide intervention protocol, and take questions from participants.

Tuesday, Sept. 19: Spread the Word

- Help increase awareness of suicide prevention and promote utilization of the 988 suicide prevention lifeline by visiting the 988 Partner Toolkit website.
 - Access free [branded print materials](#), posters, and magnets to display in your station house
 - Access free branded [social media sharables](#) (videos, GIFS, or graphics) to post on your social media feed
- Canadian IAFF members can visit <https://talksuicide.ca/> to learn about the upcoming transition to a three-digit suicide prevention number.

Wednesday, Sept. 20: Participate in Training

- You are encouraged to complete one of the IAFF behavioral health training options below. These are free, self-paced, on-demand trainings that each take about two hours to complete.
 - *Helping Members in Recovery*
Open to any IAFF member (click the link in [this flyer](#) to register)
 - *Safety Planning Intervention for Suicide Prevention*
Open to IAFF trained peers only (visit <https://my.iaff.org/> and click on “Advanced Training” to register)

Thursday, Sept. 21: Take Care of You

- Serving your community as fire service member can place great strain on your physical health, mental health, and relationships. Take a moment today and complete one specific action to care for yourself. Need some ideas? Check out [this list from SAMSHA](#)

Friday, Sept. 22: Check on a Friend

- One of the most effective ways we can prevent suicide is to preserve social connections.
 - Is there a friend, family, or crew member that you’ve been meaning to check on? Don’t wait. A simple phone call, text, or visit goes a long way to communicate “You are not alone.”
 - If you think someone could be coping with thoughts of suicide, directly ask the question, “Are you thinking about suicide?” Or call for help: Call/ text 988 (United States) or call 1-833-456-4566/text 45645 (Canada).

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IAFF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH RESOURCES

The IAFF Behavioral Health Division offers free online training, onsite in-person training, branded behavioral health literature, access to treatment partners, online recovery meetings, technical assistance, and much more. Visit <https://www.iaff.org/behavioral-health/> to familiarize yourself with IAFF resources.

- Peer Support Training <https://www.iaff.org/peer-support/>
- Resiliency Training <https://www.iaff.org/resiliency-training/>
- IAFF Center of Excellence <https://www.iaffrecoverycenter.com/>
- EHN Canada <https://www.ehncanada.com/iaff>
- IAFF Online Recovery Meetings <https://www.iaff.org/behavioral-health/#online-recovery-meetings>

SHARABLE DOCUMENTS

- [Fire Fighter Suicide: How to Cope With Grief and Loss](#)
- [How to Talk About Fire Fighter Suicide](#)
- [A Manager's Guide to Suicide Postvention in the Workplace: 10 Action Steps for Dealing with the Aftermath of Suicide](#)
- [Understanding the Difference Between PTS and PTSD](#)
- [Understanding Reactions to a Potentially Traumatic Event](#)
- [Finding the Right Clinician](#)
- [Creating a Behavioral Health Program: A Checklist](#)
- [How to Support a Crew Member After Treatment](#)

PRE-RECORDED VIDEOS

- [How to Approach a Member in Need](#)
- [IAFF Resiliency Training Pre-Course Videos](#)
- [Suicide and Suicide Prevention in Fire Service](#)

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