

USFA and NIOSH Initiate Study of Cancer among Firefighters

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Emmitsburg, MD. – The United States Fire Administration (USFA) and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) are partnering on a study to examine the potential for increased risk of cancer among firefighters due to exposures from smoke, soot, and other contaminants in the line of duty. "There is a need to have a comprehensive study of the incidence of cancer in the fire service involving objective medical and epidemiological oversight. We have lost too many firefighters from this disease," said USFA Administrator Kelvin J. Cochran. "USFA is pleased to work with NIOSH in this initiative."

This multi-year USFA supported NIOSH study will include over 18,000 current and retired career firefighters. The project will improve upon previously published firefighter studies by significantly increasing the number of individuals for whom health data will be analyzed. A larger study provides greater statistical reliability. The study will also improve on past studies by analyzing not only deaths from cancer, but also the incidence of certain cancers that have higher survival rates than others, such as testicular and prostate cancer, as well as deaths from causes other than cancer. This will improve researchers' ability to estimate risk for various cancers and to compare risk of cancer with risks for other causes of death.

"NIOSH has worked extensively with partners in the fire service to address occupational safety and health risks for firefighters," said NIOSH Director John Howard, M.D. "We appreciate the funding and support from the U.S. Fire Administration as we engage the scientifically complex question of firefighting and cancer risk."

Firefighters are exposed to smoke, soot, and fumes from fires that contain substances classified by NIOSH as potential occupational carcinogens or by the National Toxicology Program as known human carcinogens or substances reasonably anticipated to be human carcinogens. These may include byproducts of combustion such as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, as well as contaminants from building products such as asbestos and formaldehyde.

This NIOSH study supported by USFA is intended to enhance current firefighter safety knowledge and inform ongoing efforts to further characterize the cancer risk associated with these exposures due to firefighting operations. During this study, researchers will establish the population of over 18,000 career firefighters from health records of both suburban and large city fire departments.

By analyzing deaths and cancer cases among those firefighters, NIOSH will attempt to determine 1) whether more cancers than expected occurred among the cohort, and 2) whether cancers are associated with exposures to the contaminants to which the firefighters may have been exposed.

NIOSH is a federal agency which conducts research and makes recommendations for preventing work-related injury, illness, and death. NIOSH's research includes a national program to investigate fatal traumatic injuries and other causes of line-of-duty deaths among firefighters. More information about NIOSH can be found at www.cdc.gov/niosh. Additional information

about NIOSH's program to investigate firefighter deaths in the line of duty, and to make recommendations for preventing such deaths, can be found at www.cdc.gov/niosh/fire/.

Further information about this partnership effort may be found on the [USFA Web site](#).