



# January is Fire Fighter Cancer Awareness Month

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SPRINGFIELD- The Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal (OSFM) is joining forces with the Fire Fighter Cancer Support Network and the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) to raise awareness about the increased risk of cancer amongst fire fighters. The goal of this campaign is to provide fire fighters the necessary tools and guidance to develop life-saving protocols for cancer prevention and to support those with a cancer diagnosis within their departments.

Firefighter-occupational cancer is the leading cause of line-of-duty deaths in the fire service. In 2019, more than 75% of the names of firefighters added to the IAFF Fallen Firefighter Memorial Wall of Honor in Colorado Springs, Colorado, were of members who died from occupational cancer. According to a study by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), firefighters face a 9 percent increase in cancer diagnoses and a 14 percent increase in cancer-related deaths compared to the general population. While protecting the firefighter during firefighting operations,

personal protective equipment (PPE) becomes contaminated. Effective on-scene decontamination can reduce the level of surface polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) by 85% following an incident.

“The cancer rates in the fire service are alarming and we are dedicated to finding ways to eliminate those risks. We want all Fire Fighters in Illinois to be aware of the dangers posed by the carcinogens released from modern materials when they burn. One of the best ways to reduce exposure to these carcinogens is immediate decontamination at a fire scene. We also encourage all Fire Fighters to get an annual medical exam as early detection and treatment are essential to increasing the survival rate,” says Illinois State Fire Marshal Matt Perez.

The OSFM partnered with the Illinois Fire Service Institute (IFSI) and the MABAS-Illinois to create the State of Illinois Preliminary Exposure Reduction Training project in 2020. This project was developed to deliver critical firefighter health and life safety research, education, training and basic equipment to fire departments across the state. The intent of the project is to raise awareness of the increased cancer risks faced by firefighters, provide departments with free basic equipment that can be used for preliminary exposure reduction for personnel on incident response scenes, as well as training on how to properly use those tools. In 2020 alone, 1,690 kits were distributed to 500 departments in Illinois. This program continues in 2021 and the OSFM encourages departments to complete the training and join the growing list of departments who have received their buckets. All fire departments within the State of Illinois are eligible to receive free equipment after completion of the training.

To learn more about this program visit: <https://fsi.illinois.edu/decon/#!/index>.