

HEALTH & WELLNESS PROGRAMS FOR VOLUNTEER DEPARTMENTS

October 2010

NUTRITION NEWS

Health & Wellness
Series

Health & Wellness in Volunteer Fire & Emergency Services

References:

**US Fire Administration
Health and Wellness Guide
for the Volunteer Fire and
Emergency Services, 2009**

http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/fa_321.pdf

NFPA 1583, 2008 JPRs
7.1, Annex B

Statistics show that firefighting is one of the most dangerous occupations in the world. Volunteer firefighter fatalities accounted for 73 percent of all firefighting-related deaths in 2006. In that year, stress was the leading cause of on duty deaths among volunteer firefighters, leading to the death of 38 firefighters. Heart attacks were the direct cause of death in over 47 percent of on duty volunteer firefighter fatalities. In both nature and cause, stress and heart attacks killed a higher percentage of on duty volunteer firefighters than career firefighters, making clear the need for increased emphasis on cardiovascular health, physical fitness, and overall wellness in the volunteer emergency services.

In 2007, the USFA reported 118 firefighter fatalities. About half of those deaths were volunteers. Almost 50 percent of these deaths were from heart attack. These statistics underscore the health and wellness issues being addressed in this Guide, and show how current the problem is in today's volunteer fire and emergency services.

Heart attacks are the leading cause of firefighter fatalities, accounting for 47 percent of firefighter line-of-duty deaths in 2006. The number of firefighters, both career and volunteer, who suffer heart attacks while off duty remains untallied. The physical demands placed on firefighters can be very high; they often must go from a state of deep sleep to extreme alertness and high physical exertion in a matter of minutes. Further, they must carry heavy equipment through intense heat while wearing heavy protective gear. While many Americans are at risk for heart disease, the nature of firefighting requires that firefighters be particularly careful in maintaining a high level of physical fitness to combat coronary problems.

HEALTH & WELLNESS PROGRAMS FOR VOLUNTEER DEPARTMENTS

October 2010

NUTRITION NEWS

Health & Wellness
Series

Health & Wellness in Volunteer Fire & Emergency Services

1. Go to the following web site:

http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/fa_321.pdf

2. Read pages 2-10 of the US Fire Administration Health and Wellness Guide for the Volunteer Fire and Emergency Services.

3. Lead a discussion on the summary of the importance of health and wellness and the need for developing and implementing health and wellness programs in departments including:

- a. Improves heart health.
- b. Improves heat tolerance.
- c. Helps prevent Type II diabetes.
- d. Reduces risk of strains and sprains.
- e. May improve emotional state.
- f. Maintains weight loss.
- g. Maintains metabolic rate.
- h. Enhances ability to fight fires.
- i. Prevents development of back problems.
- j. Encourages overall healthy lifestyle.

4. Answer the following questions for your department.

- a. Does our department have a health and wellness program?
- b. If present, does our health and wellness program address any or all of the topics above?
- c. What are some steps that you can make to start or improve a health and wellness program for your department?