

# Oswego Town Fire District

## Firefighter cancer prevention and decontamination policy

The purpose of this policy will be to outline the best practices to be used by the Oswego Town Fire District and the Oswego Town Fire Department to attempt to prevent cancer in our members. Recent studies have shown a dramatic spike in firefighter cancer rates. This has been shown to be related to our exposure to toxins and carcinogens while operating on the fireground. This policy will offer several strategies to prevent cancer cases in our firefighters.

Decontamination is the biggest step in prevention. The quicker and more completely we can decontaminate a firefighter the lesser their exposure to carcinogens. Immediately after exiting a fire situation and prior to entering the rehabilitation area all firefighters will undergo a "gross decon." The firefighters shall utilize the "fire scene decon kit" that will be discussed later in this policy. During weather that the temperature is above freezing the firefighter will be washed down using a low pressure hose-line and soapy water. This wash down will remove a majority of the contamination on the firefighter. If the temperature is below freezing the firefighter will be brushed off using a brush from the "fire scene decon kit." Both the wash down or brushing will be done by the firefighter and their partner while still breathing air from their SCBA. This will prevent inhalation of any contamination that is being removed. The firefighters will then remove as much of their PPE as possible prior to entering the rehabilitation area.

In the rehab area firefighters will be evaluated by EMS as they have always been. In the rehab area all firefighters will have access to "decontamination wipes" to be used to clean the firefighters face, neck, hands and arms at a minimum. After being cleared to return to duty all firefighters should utilize a fresh firefighting hood and gloves to avoid using contaminated gear. All firefighters should have multiple pairs of gloves and hoods to be used. When a firefighter returns to the hot or warm zone they should be wearing a fresh hood and gloves to lessen exposure to carcinogens and toxins.

If possible no gear should be worn in the apparatus while returning to the station. This will avoid contaminating the apparatus. The apparatus operator should prepare the cab of the apparatus for the firefighters to make a comfortable return without gear. Heating and air conditioning should be used as appropriate to facilitate a comfortable return trip. All gear should be placed in a large "contractor type bag" to avoid contaminating the apparatus. These bags can be found in the "fire scene decon kit." After each fire the cab of the apparatus shall be cleaned and washed down as appropriate to remove any contamination. The seats of the apparatus should be steam cleaned at least twice a year or more as deemed necessary by the line officers.

Each Fire Engine shall have a “fire scene decon kit.” This kit will be contained in a large bucket for easy carrying. The bucket shall have a large brush, contractor’s bags, extra decon wipes, Dawn dish soap, and sun screen. On every fire scene this kit will be placed by the apparatus operator in an area that is visible to the crews operating but in an area that is safe and will not contaminate the rehab area. During temperatures above freezing a low pressure hand-line shall be stretched to this area for use in decon. The bucket shall be filled with soapy water to be used in the decon process. The wipes and sun screen shall be moved to the rehab area. Wipes should also be kept in the cab of all apparatus for use after any type of call.

Upon returning to the station all gear that has been used for structural firefighting should be washed and dried. It should be the policy of the District to ensure that all interior qualified firefighters have two sets of structural PPE. While one set is being washed the second set is placed into service.

Photo of a sample Fire Scene Decon Kit



Revised 11/19/2019