



There are many safety steps firefighters adhere to throughout their shifts, which include taking precautions immediately after responding to a fire and as they return to the firehouse. This last step, implementing precautionary steps when returning to the firehouse, is an often forgotten element that is a critical component in mitigating exposure to potential carcinogens.

Carcinogens are cancer-causing radicals, which can spread to non-affected objects and people through simple exposure. Without proper measures to reduce or eliminate potential carcinogens from turnout gear after responding to a call, these radicals can spread to the cab of the truck, the firehouse, personal vehicles, or the firefighters' homes, which then can impact anyone who comes into contact with the firefighter or their gear. For more information about cleaning turnout gear and why it is important, [click here](#).

It may seem that after turnout gear is cleaned, no other safety measures are needed. This, in fact, is not true. Where and how turnout gear is stored factors into keeping both the firehouse and PPE free from potential carcinogen exposure.

It is important to understand the necessity of establishing zones in the firehouse to help keep the risk of carcinogen exposure at bay. There should be three zones in a firehouse:

- Red, or hot, zones are areas that may be exposed to potential carcinogens, such as the truck bay and the gear storage room. Ventilation is a key component to keeping toxins from entering other areas of the building.
- Yellow, or transition, zones allow movement between the red and green zones and are often hallways leading into the station house.
- Green, or cold, zones are areas where no carcinogens should be present and include living, working, and eating areas.

These zones help ensure the ongoing safety of firehouse occupants and allow those who enter the building peace of mind.

In addition to maintaining these zones, turnout gear storage should also follow strict protocol.

- Store turnout gear in a separate room away from living quarters and the apparatus bay. Even after turnout gear is thoroughly cleaned, it may still hold traces of carcinogens, which can be spread to other mediums. Because of this lingering risk, storage areas should be classified as a red zone.
- Ensure the room is well ventilated and not connected to the apparatus bay. The ventilation helps circulate fresh air while maintaining a safe distance from the apparatus bay helps reduce further contamination from engine exhaust.

Adhering to the red, yellow, and green zoning protocol reinforces safety expectations in the firehouse and aligns with overarching turnout gear care instructions by serving as a reminder to follow firehouse safety procedures. These zones also help create an ongoing culture of safety, which emphasizes the potential impact of carcinogen exposure and works to create a healthier environment for firefighters, their families, and their communities.

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