



Reducing Risk: Ways Firefighters can Help Minimize Their Exposure to Carcinogens



Firefighters bravely put themselves at the forefront of danger to protect their neighbors and community. While proper flame resistant (FR) attire and equipment are readily available for fire protection, it's important to note that safety precautions should continue once the fire is extinguished and even after coming back to the station. Along with personal protective equipment (PPE) and air-purifying respiratory units, there are important safety measures which will help prevent firefighters encountering carcinogens after the fire has been extinguished. Partnering with Fire Engineering and Firefighter Cancer Support, Milliken ResQ sponsored a [Firefighter Cancer Prevention and Reduction webinar](#) detailing valuable tips for reducing firefighters' exposure to carcinogenic hazards and creating the safest possible environment for them. Below are some key takeaways from this webinar.

Firefighters are exposed to a range of harmful chemical hazards, like carcinogens, when on the job. Decontaminating turnout gear after fighting a fire can help reduce continued exposure. Clothing and gear should be decontaminated at the scene of the fire before leaving the site. Everything that encountered potential carcinogens must be rinsed and scrubbed with a soap and water mixture before removal. Once all gear and PPE have been scrubbed down, proper storage is essential to help keep carcinogens at bay. Avoiding skin contact with any materials that may be affected and placing gloves, coat, bunker gear pants, boots and helmet in a bag and securing with tape will help prevent further contamination. PPE must then be properly washed per specific care instructions before being used or handled again. Once their PPE is removed, the firefighter should shower within one hour to help prevent carcinogens entering through the skin. Thoroughly wiping down skin with a wet wipe is an alternative option if a shower is not possible.

Keeping the truck cab uncontaminated is equally as important as cleaning PPE, gear and skin. Store potentially contaminated PPE and equipment out of the cab and in designated, controlled areas to help greatly reduce the risk of encountering potentially hazardous carcinogens for all who enter the truck.

Finally, distinguishing red, yellow and green zones in the firehouse is instrumental in helping reduce potential health risks. The red or hot zones are areas of the station that are exposed to carcinogens and include the truck bay areas and contaminated PPE and gear areas. These areas must be properly ventilated to further ensure safety throughout the station. The yellow or transition zones allow movement between the red and green zones and are hallways and doors leading into the station house. The green or cold zones contain living, working, eating and sleeping areas where no known hazards should be present. Having clearly defined spaces throughout the station will help reduce further contamination of potential health risks.

Adapting to new policies and being aware of potential risks can help greatly improve quality of life for firefighters and their families in the long run. Carcinogens are a big concern for firefighters, however, the right steps and policies can help put firefighters at ease.

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For access to the full Firefighter Cancer Prevention and Reduction webinar, [click here](#), and for additional information, download our white paper, [The Truth About Cancer Hazards and Turnout Gear](#).

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