

OPERATIONS ROUTINE



ANNUAL MEDICAL EXAMS

Annual medical exams for fire fighters are important to detect cancer and other health conditions early because fire fighters are exposed to hazardous materials and chemicals on a regular basis, which increases the risk of developing various health issues, including cancer. Early detection through regular check-ups allows for prompt treatment and can improve outcomes. Additionally, regular physicals can help identify and address other health problems, such as cardiovascular disease, respiratory issues and musculoskeletal injuries, all of which are common among fire fighters. By monitoring one's health regularly, fire fighters can take proactive steps to maintain their physical and mental well-being.

Medical exams are important for a few other reasons:

- WAC 296-842 mandates respiratory protection if a member is entering an atmosphere with toxic products of combustion. WAC 296-842-14005 requires a medical evaluation prior to being fitted for respiratory protection.
- WAC 296-62-07314 requires a medical exam for any employee prior to being assigned to work in an area that may release carcinogens. Fire fighters often enter unknown carcinogenic environments, including structure fires, car fires or dumpster fires.

These exams are to be provided at no cost to the employee and should be provided annually after an initial examination. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard 1582 also provides guidance for annual medical exams.

A sample recommendation of an annual medical exam, Provider's Guide to Firefighter Medical Evaluations, is included in Appendix C. The IAFF/IAFC Joint Wellness Fitness Initiative also provides an annual recommended physical for incumbent fire fighters. Specific tests, such as red and white blood cell counts, heavy metals screenings and cancer screenings, can assist with early detection of many common cancers seen in the fire service today. These simple exams can determine if cancer is a risk, as well as if it is present. Having this annual exam is imperative to ensure early detection and aggressive action to address any problems.

It is important to include retired fire fighters alongside active members for annual exams and bloodwork to ensure their continued health and well-being. In Washington State, presumptive illness laws typically extend up to five years from retirement, acknowledging the potential long-term effects of their prior exposures to hazardous substances and stressful conditions on their overall health. To adhere to best practices, it is recommended that retired fire fighters undergo the same medical exams, bloodwork and behavioral health screenings as active members.

In addition to the health conditions covered in this report, there is increasing information from research studies demonstrating adverse reproductive effects in both male and female fire fighters. While addressing these reproductive outcomes is outside the scope of this current manual, many of the best practices detailed in this report, such as exposure reduction, also should help prevent adverse reproductive effects.