

Health & Safety Office Update

Uniformed Firefighters Association Protection & Prevention

May, 2013

The UFA is pleased to announce that the Health and Safety Office has been awarded a grant in the amount of \$115,117 by the NYS Department of Labor/ Hazard Abatement Board. The grant period is from 8/1/13 - 7/31/14. Grant funding will continue to be used to partially offset the salary of our Field Representative and Grant Director as well as to provide critical training and information so that we can perform our job with the highest level of safety.

The Health and Safety office is led by Sergeant-at-Arms/ Health & Safety Officer, Gerard Fitzgerald. Gerard has served with the FDNY for 14 years assigned to Engine 318. Gerard is dedicated to the protection of our members from unnecessary risk and illness. He can be reached @ (212)545-6964 or gfitzgerald@ufanyc.org

Erin O'Donovan is the Program Manager/Grant Director and oversees the above mentioned grant. Erin can be of assistance with questions concerning health & safety and can be reached at (212)545-6965 or eodonovan@ufanyc.org



Tony Caracciolo is the Field Representative. He is a retired FDNY firefighter. Tony provides training in a number of firefighter health and safety issues at firehouses. He can also assist you in any questions concerning health and safety matters. Tony may be reached at (212) 545-6513 or tonyC@ufanyc.org

The Health and Safety office is committed to making your safety our #1 priority. As part of that allegiance, we offer a wide variety of pamphlets on various health and safety issues. Please contact the Health & Safety office to request pamphlets, schedule training at your firehouse or to discuss any Health & Safety concerns.

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Seat Belt Safety

Exciting News!! There is a life saving tool that can save lives...

Amazingly, the first potential life or death decision that each firefighter faces actually occurs before the apparatus leaves the house. A seat belt can save your life, but only if you use it.

If you fasten your seat belt every time that you get on your rig you could be saving your life, the lives of fellow firefighters who mimic your behavior and the lives of the civilians that you are in transit to rescue. It only takes a few seconds to fasten your seat belt but the domino affect of this action could save countless lives.

In recent years the importance of fastening your seat belt has been emphasized in firefighter safety and for good reason. Motor vehicle collisions are the second leading cause of firefighter line-of-duty fatalities nationally. In the majority of these fatalities it was found that the firefighters were not wearing their seat belts. The new **Ready Reach Seat Belt** system has been retrofitted in all apparatus. The new system is faster and easier to use. The strap extends making it more accommodating for bunker gear. The bright orange strap is easier to find. Please do not become a statistic. We as first responders see first hand the horrifying results of civilians not utilizing their seat belts and yet still do not use them 100% of the time. We have too much to lose if our first priority is not a safe and proper response at all times. By fastening our seat belts each time we get on the rig to leave the house we can significantly reduce our risk.

Our safety needs to be a priority and we can work together to reduce the risks that we face everyday. Lead by example. It is the right thing to do for yourself, your fire department, your family and your community. Please respond with due caution at all times! The UFA Health and Safety office would like to remind you that although time is crucial, the goal is to arrive on the scene safely and return home the same. Being injured or killed in an accident on the way to a scene doesn't help anyone.

Cancer Causing Chemicals

Firefighters are known to be at an increased risk for cancer. In a recent study, scientists provide proof that when flame retardants burn, firefighters are exposed to cancer-causing chemicals. Flame-retarded household items like furniture, televisions, computers and building materials produce chemical carcinogens when burned in a fire. This study measured the amount of those chemicals in the blood of firefighters. The amounts of cancer causing chemicals found in the blood of the firefighters was at an extremely high concentration and at different patterns than in the general population. The firefighter's blood also presented with an elevated level of another cancer causing chemical that is linked to the risk of stroke, a perfluorinated chemical known as **PFOA**.

It is important to understand the risks and realize that there are things that you can do to reduce your risk. Wear your personal protective equipment and ensure that it is clean. Shower as soon as possible after each job. For information on cancer prevention please contact Erin O'Donovan of the Health & Safety office at 212-545-6965.

Tony's Corner

*(The Health & Safety Office is re-issuing the below article from the May 2011 issue. The information provided regarding medical bills and CD-72's is essential. We urge you to read and call with any questions.)

As the Health and Safety Field Representative, my job is to train members with a list of topics that we feel are pertinent to the health and safety of all firefighters. My position is guided and funded by a grant from the New York State Department of Labor Hazard Abatement Board. Under the grant, I visit firehouses weekly and discuss these topics and also perform risk assessments on the firehouses. At every firehouse visit, once I fulfill the grant requirements, I will always stay and answer all members' questions and concerns about firefighter health and safety. The most common subjects are LOD medical bills sent to members' homes, proper wording for CD-72/73 (incident/accident, symptoms, etc), medical office issues and individual, more specific member issues. Below I will touch on the first two subjects.

With regard to receiving medical bills for a LODI at your home, you are responsible to bring it to our attention as soon as possible. You are receiving the bill in error and, if not dealt with immediately, collection notices and letters from lawyers will follow. The worst thing that you can do is ignore the bill and think the city will handle it! Credit scores can and have been adversely affected. The procedure for our members is to fax, or email a copy of the bill to the Health and Safety office along with the corresponding CD-72. (fax# 212.683.4768 or email: tonyc@ufanyc.org). Understand that we expedite the bill being paid and try to obtain, if needed, an acknowledgement that the bill was never your responsibility. Unfortunately, it will still be your responsibility to call the credit agencies to have it removed from your history and that is why it is critical to take the bill, find the CD-72 and send it to us immediately.

The CD-72 is the most important document you will fill out in your career and needs to be treated as such. We are all guilty at one time or another of looking at the document with a 2-3 week mindset as we write it. Simply put, the "I'll get a couple of weeks out of it" mentality is dangerous. We have all heard the horror stories and they will continue if we take the nature of our injury lightly. It is your responsibility to come up with the narrative and hand it to your officer to put on the form. There are no witnesses to what happened and how you felt (symptoms, not diagnosis!) during the chaos of the fire ground with zero visibility. Never diagnose or diminish your injuries. For example, if you fall backwards and land on your mask, you potentially crushed your neck, spine, back or shoulder. You did not strain/sprain/twist or wrench your neck, back or shoulder. These words should be avoided in your narrative. The difference between an incident and an accident is what confuses most members. You were hired and expected to perform all the basic duties of firefighting. These are, but not limited to, opening hydrants, stretching and operating hose lines, pulling ceilings, forcing doors, etc. If you are pulling a ceiling and the ceiling falls on you, it can be deemed an incident. If you are pulling the same ceiling and an object hidden in that ceiling (unexpected, unforeseen) falls on you and injures you, it will be considered an accident.

As the UFA Health and Safety Field Rep I take my job seriously. I am always available to all members and I will help in any way I can. My cell number is 718-536-7223 or you can email me at tonyc@ufanyc.org with questions or to schedule an appointment for a NYSDOL presentation.

WTC Prescription Update

As of Nov 26, 2012, the WTC Prescription Plan has a new Pharmacy Benefit Manager (PBM). The new PBM is Emdeon, replacing Express Scripts. The change in PBMs stems from a Zadroga Law provision, which requires that all WTC Prescription Plans from the various WTC Clinic Centers (FDNY and non-FDNY), all be overseen by one PBM.

- Emdeon doesn't have a Mail Service facility of their own, therefore they have sub-contracted with Walgreens. The Walgreens WTC Mail Service facility is located in Tempe, Arizona.

(The FDNY WTC Prescription Plan continues to be a '**mandatory to Mail Order**' plan. The WTC Prescription Plan fills 82% of all WTC maintenance medication prescriptions as Mail Order. As you know, this is the most cost-effective way of using limited WTC health funds.)

- Any existing maintenance medication prescriptions at Express Scripts containing open refills have been transferred from Express Scripts to Walgreens.
- Walgreens has 'auto refill' in place. As refill dates become due, the remaining refills will be processed and shipped to our members.

At this time, there WILL NOT be a new prescription card issued to members. This is only a concern for prescriptions which need to be filled at a local pharmacy. Currently, any FD WTC member receiving a WTC prescription, at a WTC Medical Monitoring or WTC Treatment appointment, which needs to be filled at a local pharmacy, will receive a '**Temporary Proof of Benefits**' form. This form will take the place of a WTC prescription card.

Any member with at least one certified WTC health condition [a Zadroga Law provision], received a letter which provided them with details of the transition, and with their unique 911 I.D. number.

There continues to be a local pharmacy component to the WTC Prescription plan. A script for a time sensitive prescription medication, issued on an emergent basis (antibiotic, codeine cough syrup), or a controlled substance prescription medication, or a fill-in prescription (30 days or less) for a maintenance medication, may still be filled at a local pharmacy, as long as the prescription is written by an FD WTC doctor.

One very nice customer service enhancement for our members under the revised WTC Plan is that now **any local pharmacy nationwide from the smallest Mom and Pop pharmacy, to the largest chain pharmacy location, is now a participating WTC pharmacy.**

NIOSH (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health), the federal agency given responsibility by the Zadroga Law for oversight of federally funded WTC Health Programs, now determines whether medications may be added to the covered list of WTC medications.

DEADLINE: Victims Compensation Fund

By law, World Trade Center (WTC) exposed individuals who plan to file a claim with the **September 11th Victims Compensation Fund (VCF)** and who knew (or reasonably should have known) that they had a WTC-related physical health condition as of October 3, 2011 **must register online by October 3, 2013.**

WTC-exposed individuals who didn't know as of October 3, 2011 that they had a physical health condition related to their exposure must register within 2 years of the date they learned or reasonably should have known this information for the first time.

As long as you register within the relevant two-year window, you can submit your eligibility form online at any time through October 3, 2016.

To register for the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund, file a claim, or for a list of frequently asked questions and answers please go to www.vcf.gov.

PPE Update

The Health & Safety office would like to notify it's membership of some new updates to the personal protective equipment. The new gear is going to have a 3 inch collar rather than a 5 inch. The pocket on right side of the jacket will be reconfigured to be less conflicting with the Personal Safety System (PSS). There will be a small pocket on the left leg about thigh high. The knee pads will be also be changed. At least one set of the new gear will be given to the probies and it will be distributed to members as each member's gear is exchanged and the remaining older gear is used up.

****ALWAYS WEAR YOUR PPE!!****

The UFA Health & Safety office cannot stress enough the importance of always wearing your PPE and wearing it correctly. Please check your PPE regularly and make sure that you are taking proper care of it. If you note any concerns regarding your PPE, notify the officer-on-duty immediately. If your PPE needs to be sent for decon, please inspect your backup gear thoroughly.

Please contact the Health & Safety Office with any questions or concerns regarding PPE.

Mental Health

As firefighters, dealing with traumatic events can be all in a day's work and often unavoidable. It's not uncommon to experience feelings of anxiety, sadness, worry, uneasiness, fear, anger and isolation. So is reliving the event through disturbing memories or nightmares. You may be suffering from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). The good news is that PTSD can be treated but you must take the first step of seeking help. Don't suffer alone. If you think you are suffering from PTSD, having suicidal thoughts or struggling with stress management please pick up the phone and seek help, don't isolate yourself.

We do not belong just to a company, we belong to the Department family. And like members of a family, we often put our utmost trust in each other. Therefore, to best reach out to those members in need who may be less receptive to outsiders, the FDNY Counseling Service Unit (CSU) utilizes peer counselors. These peers, consisting of active duty and retired firefighters, are the CSU's first line of action. Trained in Post-traumatic Stress and Critical Incident Stress Management, these firefighters have been providing invaluable help since 9/11, visiting every firehouse in the city and encouraging Department personnel to ask for help if they need it.

FDNY COUNSELING SERVICE UNIT (CSU)-

MANHATTAN

251 Lafayette Street, 3rd Floor

New York, NY 10012

Tel (212) 570-1693 24 Hour Phone Line

FORT TOTTEN, QUEENS

Fort Totten, Building 413B

Bayside, NY 11359

718-352-2140

STATEN ISLAND

1688 Victory Boulevard Suite 101

Staten Island, NY 10314

718-815-4111

BRENTWOOD, SUFFOLK COUNTY

Center Cottage-Suffolk Community College

Crooked Hill Road

Brentwood NY 11717

631-851-6888

ORANGE/PUTNAM/ROCKLAND COUNTIES

2279 Goshen Turnpike

Middletown, NY 10941

845 -695-1029

Get Help, Don't try to handle it alone!

For a list of additional resources & support services available to you please call Erin O'Donovan of the Health & Safety office at 212.545.6965 or email eodonovan@ufanyc.org.

Heat Stress

As we look forward to the approaching summer season, the Health & Safety office would like to caution our members about the added hazards the warmer weather can bring about. Weather and climate play a significant role in a firefighter's health. Warmer average temperatures will likely lead to an increase in the frequency and severity of fires and heat-related illnesses. For these reasons, Sergeant-at-Arms/ Health & Safety Officer, Gerard Fitzgerald would like to remind you that by keeping yourself hydrated you can significantly reduce your risk of overheating and enjoy a healthy summer season.

The signs of heat stress include, but are not limited to:

- Heat cramps
- Cool, moist, pale skin
- Nausea
- Rapid or weak pulse
- Rapid breathing
- Dizziness or weakness
- Headache
- Loss of thirst
- Inability to sweat or hot, dry skin
- Confusion or passing out

Any member exhibiting any signs or symptoms of heat stress related illness should be evaluated and monitored by EMS.

Actions that you can take to reduce your risk of heat stress include:

- Remove your helmets and coats, and open up the front flap of your pants as soon as operations safely permit to release trapped heat and humidity within Bunker Gear.
- Drink plenty of fluids (20 oz. initially and 6 – 8 oz. every 15 minutes thereafter).
- Seek cool, shady areas. Casually moving about will enhance rehydration due to increased blood circulation. Make use of the RAC unit's equipment and supplies (ice, water, drinks, and cold towels).
- No member should be alone during any phase of the recuperation process; maintain the "buddy system" for the duration of R&R.

Your body needs plenty of fluids to cool itself. Most firefighters show up on scene dehydrated before they start to work. This dehydration just puts an added stress on your heart. Drink plenty of water and help out your heart and your fellow firefighters by staying safe and healthy. It is an easy way to protect yourself.

For more information on avoiding Heat Stress please contact Erin O'Donovan of the Health & Safety office at 212-545-6965 or email eodonovan@ufanyc.org

With the warmer season drawing near remember that by giving yourself adequate **Rest, Nutrition** and **Hydration** you can reduce your increased risk and

Enjoy a healthy summer season!

A Message From the Health & Safety Officer

In the wake of the senseless tragedy which occurred at the **Boston Marathon**, we remind our members to always take every possible precaution when responding to a call.

We don't know who, when or where but the threat of terrorism is eminent. As first responders we face a grave risk of falling victim to our enemies. When you arrive on a scene be cautious, approach with extra vigilance. Keep your eyes and ears open. If you see anything suspicious, report the activity immediately to your superior officer and/or the NYPD. Trust your instincts and your training.

As we learned 11 years ago, New York City will always be a target for terrorism, and we will continue as we always have to protect the people of this city.

ALWAYS BE ON HIGH ALERT. TAKE EVERY SAFETY AND PREVENTATIVE MEASURE POSSIBLE!

Stay Safe, Healthy and Have a Great Summer!

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www.nfanyc.org

http://

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