

Reducing firefighter cancer risk: policies prove useful

Firefighting is a dangerous business. In addition to the potential for injuries from fire and heat, there is also the potential for structure collapse and exposure to numerous toxins that are emitted from the burning building and its contents. To help reduce our firefighters' exposure (through skin and lungs) to the dangerous cancer causing substances they can encounter while firefighting and performing overhaul (fire scene clean up), the Township requires that all firefighters follow specific procedures including: Firefighters must use their self-contained breathing apparatus (mask and air tank) from the time they initially attack the fire until all the overhaul or scene clean up is completed. After an incident and before leaving the scene, firefighters must perform a general cleaning of their personal protective equipment or PPE (which includes turn out gear, boots, hood, helmet, gloves etc.) to remove as much soot and particulates as possible. Once back at their station, their PPE must be removed before they enter the living quarters of the station and washed. Firefighters must shower and change uniforms. Time permitting, firefighters are encouraged to utilize the firehouse sauna at 120-150F for 10-15 minutes to encourage the purging of any toxins absorbed during and after firefighting.