



Contaminated Gear:

At a Fire Station

Procedures to lessen firefighters' exposures from contaminated personal protective equipment



Photo courtesy of Fairfax County Fire & Rescue

Prioritize laundering

After fire responses, prioritize laundering of contaminated gear.

Establish hazard zones

Delineate areas in the station where gear could be inadvertently contaminated by combustion products and areas that should be kept clean.

Dedicate a storage area

Store laundered or decontaminated gear in a dedicated area away from the apparatus bay.

Keep gear out

Keep turnout gear out of areas such as recreation rooms, bedrooms, offices, kitchens, and gyms.

Reducing Exposure through Gear Handling and Storage at the Station

Turnout gear and other equipment can become contaminated after use in firefighting and other operations. Contaminants can unintentionally transfer to living or office areas if departments do not control where firefighters wear or store gear in the station.

Laundering

After fire operations, departments should transport contaminated gear in sealed gear bags and prioritize this gear for laundering. Your department may choose to send gear to an independent service provider for professional laundering.

Proper Storage

Departments should store laundered or decontaminated gear in a dedicated gear storage area. Ideally, this area should have an exhaust fan that discharges outdoors. Departments should not store turnout gear in the apparatus bay. Combustion products from gas and diesel engines in the bay may transfer to and further contaminate the gear. Exhaust capture systems can help reduce potential contamination and should be used regardless of where gear is stored.

Clean Station Wear

After fire responses, departments should provide the time and means for firefighters to promptly take showers and put on clean station wear. They should also instruct firefighters to bag dirty station wear and store it outside of living and office areas until it can be properly laundered.

The NIOSH National Firefighter Registry for Cancer
is investigating how protective practices impact firefighters' cancer risk.

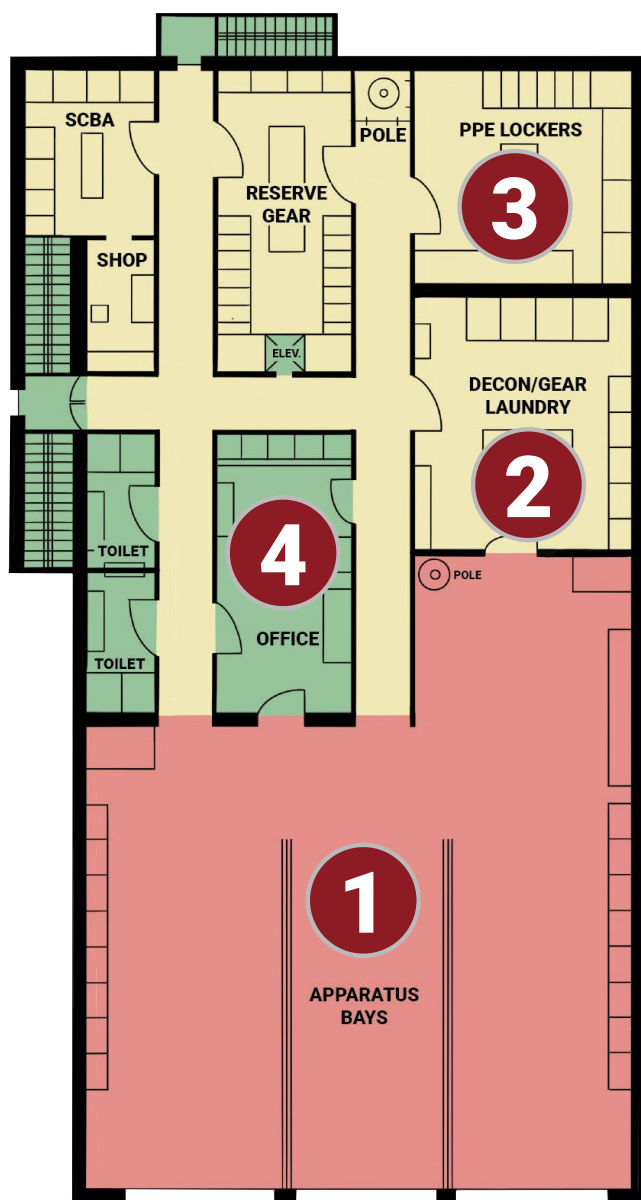
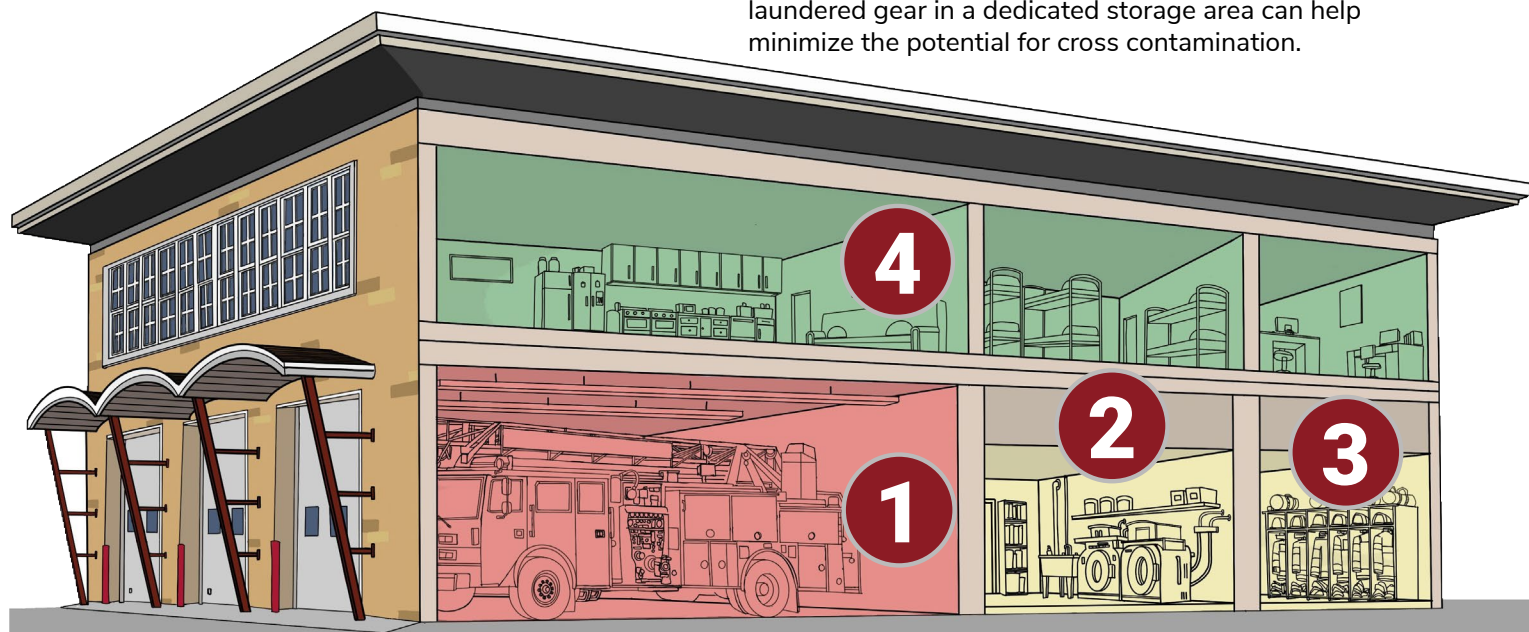
Learn more at www.cdc.gov/NFR



Keep the station and gear clean

Turnout gear and other equipment can become contaminated after use in firefighting operations. Fire apparatus can release combustion products into the bay.

Taking measures to delineate areas in a fire station where contaminated items are allowed or disallowed can help protect firefighters from exposure. Storing laundered gear in a dedicated storage area can help minimize the potential for cross contamination.



- 1 Contaminated Areas (Bays):**
The apparatus bay stores potentially dirty tools and equipment, as well as gasoline or diesel vehicles that generate exhaust which can contaminate gear. Firefighters can wear turnout gear in this area, but gear should not be stored in the bay as contaminants could transfer onto it.
- 2 Transition Area (Laundry Room):**
Some contamination can occur in the gear washing room when dirty gear is brought in to be laundered.
- 3 Transition Area (Gear Storage Room):**
Gear may contain residual contaminants after cleaning. Having a dedicated gear room helps keep these contaminants out of living and office areas.
- 4 Clean Areas (Living and Office Spaces):**
Living and office areas should be kept free from contamination. Turnout gear and dirty station wear should not be worn or stored in these areas.

The Firefighter Cancer Support Network thanks the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health for its contributions to this fact sheet.