

POST-RETIREMENT CANCER RISK



This factsheet was developed by the International Association of Fire Fighters and the Firefighter Cancer Support Network.

Exposure to carcinogens is cumulative throughout a fire fighter's career. The amount of chemicals such as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), volatile organic compounds (VOCs), diesel exhaust, asbestos, and many others may not seem significant after one shift, but it is important to remember that these exposures add up and can increase your risk for cancer, even in retirement.

Many cancers have varying latency periods – the gap between exposure and diagnosis. Fire fighters may receive a diagnosis years after retiring from active duty. Since cancer can develop slowly, it can be years or decades after initial exposure before it is diagnosed.

Understanding cumulative exposure and taking action early can help fire fighters manage the long-term risks associated with the job.

- Be consistent with and continue medical screenings into retirement. Annual physicals are crucial. Be sure that your primary care physician knows your firefighting history and exposure risks, even into retirement.
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle to help counteract cumulative damage. This includes eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and maintaining a healthy weight.
- Watch for subtle or late-developing symptoms. Make sure to report any new symptoms to your primary care physician. This could be a persistent cough, fatigue, unexplained weight loss, pain, skin changes, or other symptoms.
- Keep a personal exposure record. This could include fires fought, years of service, use of firefighting foams, and if you have experienced any health incidents. This will help your healthcare team to understand your risks and can be used to help support presumptive claims if needed.
- Stay informed on current research and screenings, and participate in fire fighter cancer registries such as the [National Firefighter Registry \(NFR\) for Cancer](#) by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

It's important to remember that while past exposures can't be undone, you can stay vigilant and proactive about your health, even in retirement.

