

SAFETY BULLETIN

Ensure your Team is Prepared!

Burns Should Not Happen!

FOCUS: Far too many firefighters suffer from burns today. Our safety efforts must be enhanced to address this serious situation.

CHALLENGE: Technology has made significant improvements with regards to safer personal protective equipment (PPE) for firefighters today. Departments spend a significant portion of their budgets to obtain the best equipment for their personnel. Despite this fact, we are still seeing burns occur at an alarming rate. Too often the burns occur due to firefighters not wearing the appropriate PPE for the task at hand. Every firefighter should be turned out in National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards compliant, state of the art, Personal Protective Equipment and that equipment should be worn according to the established SOP's or SOG's.

Interviews with burned firefighters have clearly pointed out two major issues that need to be addressed to reduce the number burn injuries occurring each year. Turnouts have limitations. These turnouts must not be subjected to conditions that exceed their capability. They can, and do fail when we expose the equipment to conditions that exceed their limitations.

A second surprising factor is the significant number of burns resulting from non-turned out or only partially turned out individuals in the "Hot Zone". Interviews indicate that some firefighters do not completely don their turnouts until they do entry. This practice is consistent with NFPA findings of smoke inhalation injuries that occur outside of the involved structure. The key issues of when to turnout and when to exit continue to be important issues for every firefighter and command officer. We must remember turnout equipment provides a barrier to hazardous exposures but is only effective if it is used properly!

DISCUSSION

- Does your department have a policy about wearing PPE?
- Have you or someone in the department has an injury or near miss related to PPE?
- What is the department's policy on turnout usage?
- What SOP's and SOG's could be established to help firefighters better identify the "risk zones" where PPE should be used?
- What are the primary factors firefighters should consider to identify an unacceptable level of heat prior to turnout failure?
- Who is responsible at the emergency scene to enforce turnout usage?
- Does the culture of the firefighters and officers you work with promote or discourage putting your safety first?
- What positive actions should fellow firefighters take to help enforce PPE usage?

The greatest asset of the fire service is our people; protect them!

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See more Safety Bulletins online: www.washingtonfirechiefs.org and be prepared!