

# Know the risks

# Take charge of your health

# FIREFIGHTERS & CANCER

## GENERAL PUBLIC

Cancer is the leading cause of death



2 out of 5 people will get cancer



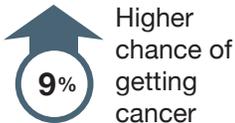
1 out of 4 people will die of cancer

Chance of getting cancer:

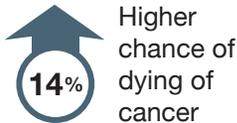


## FIREFIGHTERS

Same risk as general public, PLUS:



Higher chance of getting cancer



Higher chance of dying of cancer



Higher rates for all kinds of cancer, but particularly: mesothelioma, esophageal, colon and kidney

In Canada, 45% of men and 41% of women will battle cancer in their lifetime. If you are a firefighter, your chances are 9% higher.

Biggest occupational cancer risks for firefighters:

1. Toxins in the smoke, soot and tar from synthetic building materials – inhaled, swallowed, or absorbed through skin
2. Diesel exhaust fumes – inhaled

Firefighters also tend to have a high incidence of these other risk factors:

- Tobacco / smokeless tobacco use
- Obesity
- Poor diet
- Alcohol use
- Lack of exercise
- Poor sleep patterns

**Although your chosen career increases your chances of getting cancer, there is a lot you can do to reduce your risk.**

**See inside this brochure for details.**



Source: 2015 Canadian Cancer Society statistics, 2015 University of the Fraser Valley study Firefighters and Cancer

For information about proper decon procedures or anything in this brochure, please contact the Surrey Fire Service Occupational Health and Safety Committee.



## What you can do in your life

Lifestyle changes have the biggest effect on your risk.

### Most important things you can do

1. Don't smoke.
2. Exercise regularly.

### What else you can do

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Eat healthy food – more fruits and vegetables, less refined sugars and junk food.
- Avoid heavy and binge drinking.
- Get enough sleep.
- Find healthy ways to reduce stress.

### Medical screening

Cancer doesn't have to be a death sentence, if it's caught early enough.

- Start medical screening for cancer **10 years** earlier than the general population, or **10 years** earlier than the youngest case of cancer in your immediate family (whichever is younger).
- Establish an annual health maintenance program that includes baseline cancer screening and surveillance.
- Ensure your family doctor is aware of the cancer risks to firefighters.

**Don't be embarrassed to advocate for your own health. See resources at right for help with early screening.**

## What you can do at work

**Don't take shortcuts** – these safety procedures protect you, your colleagues, and your family.

### Most important things you can do

1. Use SCBA from initial attack to end of the decon process.
2. Wear your PPE and SCBA properly in both active and post-fire environments.

### Protect yourself

- Always do a gross field decon if there is soot or particulates on your PPE.
- Immediately and at the fire scene, wash to remove as much soot as possible from head, neck, jaw, throat, underarms and hands.
- Change your clothes and wash them ASAP after a fire.
- Shower thoroughly after a fire.
- Clean your PPE, gloves, balaclava and helmet at the hall immediately after a fire.

### Protect others

- Do not take contaminated clothes or PPE home or store them in your vehicle.
- Decon the fire apparatus interior after fires.
- Always use the exhaust extraction system when returning to the fire hall.
- Keep PPE out of living quarters. Between shifts, store PPE in the gear room.

## Resources and information

### Medical screening letter for doctors

A letter has been developed by an oncologist for firefighters to take to their doctors to request early medical screening based on their profession.

Download at: [www.surrey.ca/Cancer\\_Screening](http://www.surrey.ca/Cancer_Screening)

### Operational guidelines

Familiarize yourself with and follow these OGs:

- Personal Protective Clothing Equipment (PPE) Maintenance – download at: [www.surrey.ca/PPE\\_Maintenance](http://www.surrey.ca/PPE_Maintenance)
- Exhaust Extraction System – download at: [www.surrey.ca/Exhaust\\_Extraction](http://www.surrey.ca/Exhaust_Extraction)

### Research paper

The study *Firefighters and Cancer: Understanding Risk Factors within an Environment of Change* was produced in June 2015 by the University of the Fraser Valley and authored by Martha Dow, Kenneth Kunz, Len Garis and Larry Thomas.

Search at <http://cjr.ufv.ca> to read the paper.

### Health and safety information

Contact the Occupational Health and Safety Committee with other questions about your health and safety.