

Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives

Initiative #2



Throughout the 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives, there are opportunities for both organizational and personal change. As your department moves toward adopting a safety-minded culture, use the tools offered in the 16 initiatives as guiding documents.

Enhance the personal and organizational accountability for health and safety throughout the fire service.

Physical examinations are an integral part of a firefighter's career. Pre-employment baseline examinations followed by annual examinations should be a mandatory policy for all fire service agencies. After meeting initial physical requirements for firefighting it is vital to maintain a high level of fitness to safely perform the job so "everyone goes home."

Management systems should be in place that supports the ongoing oversight and sustainability of health and safety programs. A culture must be established by management that sustains an upbeat attitude of health and safety programs. A program manager should be appointed to ensure continuity and oversight of programs. Oftentimes, this role is assumed by the safety officer.

Adequate equipment, facilities, and support staff are crucial to the success of a physical fitness program. Amenities may be provided in-house or through commercial fitness providers. Where available, facilities, equipment, and professional oversight can be shared with colleges and universities or major medical centers. Larger fire organizations may be able to provide their own workout facilities, whereas smaller organizations may have to rely on outside providers due to the economics of equipment purchasing and upkeep.

Firefighting is a high stress career which must be accounted for both in quarters and on the emergency scene. Working conditions may negatively impact a firefighter's physical condition without effective stress management. Proper rehabilitation while on scene and fire stations designed with facilities to provide job-related physical and mental stress can combat these negative stressors.

Health and wellness does not stop after a firefighter is no longer on duty. Health and safety programs should continue through a firefighter's life as a style of living, both on and off duty

CHALLENGE

All too often fire service health and safety initiatives fall short of their intended goals, in part due to accountability by the organization or the individual firefighter. Often this lack of accountability rests with a general attitude where bravado is the primary ingredient that one must possess in order to be perceived as a good firefighter by one's self, his/her peers and the public at large. It is the intent of this paper to address this attitude head-on by suggesting strategies whereby it is not only the organization's responsibility, but the individual firefighter's as well, to ensure that accountability is an integral component to creditable health and safety programs. To do this, we must make a personal commitment to accountability regarding health and safety issues at all times and at all levels of our fire service careers.

Each fire service organization must promote safe practices; each individual must have the tools to be safe and adhere to safe practices at ALL TIMES

TEACHING POINTS



DISCUSSION

Does your department have an accountability checklist for every position in the organization, for all identified risks, and standard practices associated with those risks? If yes, where can it be found?

What are your department's accountability expectations for all ranks of the organization from the fire chief through the supervisory chain down to the individual firefighter?

What roles does every individual play in your fire organization to maintain the health and safety of all members?

Are you familiar with the idea of Organizational Accountability?

Who is directly responsible for the health and safety of the department members?

Has the organization identified the risks for each position / task / function?

What programs does your department need to implement in order to raise level of health and safety?

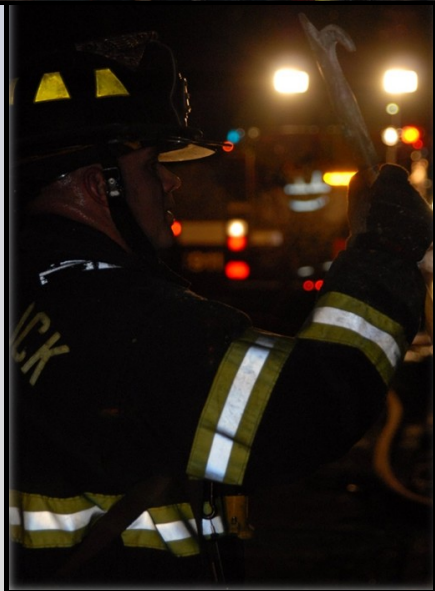
Are all members of the organization accountable for their health and safety?

What is the benefit of continuing medical evaluations?

Does your organization value health and safety? Why or Why Not?

What role does attitude play in health and safety?

Does the culture of your organization support the health and safety programs currently in place?



Recommendations for Achieving Organizational Accountability

Develop a model accountability checklist for every position in the organization for all the identified risks and standard practices associated with those risks.

Develop accountability expectations for all ranks of the organization from the fire chief through the supervisory chain down to the individual firefighter.

Every organization should publish a safety accountability statement that holds all members of the organization accountable at all times.

A management system should be in place that supports the ongoing management and sustainability of health and safety programs.

Management must develop a culture within the organization that sustains a positive attitude of health and safety programs; ideally, a program manager should be appointed to ensure continuity and oversight of programs.



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Visit us at www.eghillinois.org for further information

