



Access

HEALTH SYSTEMS

FIREFIGHTER MEDICAL TESTING PROGRAM

FIT FOR DUTY?

NIOSH, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, through their investigations into line-of-duty deaths, has determined that overexertion and stress related cardiac issues pose the greatest risk, with heart attacks making up more than 48% of fatalities in 2006 and 2007 alone. Realizing the dangers, many departments have chosen to look at the medical testing examination as a means of looking for health conditions which would represent excessive risk at various levels of performance.

Basic Requirements

The mandated portion of the examination is based on an OSHA/PESH requirement to determine fitness for respiratory protection devices. To this end, a respiratory status history, a physical examination and pulmonary testing are the basic components which should be performed to satisfy the mandate.

Additional Testing

In this environment of heightened liability, many companies look to a more in depth assessment. Typical and recommended testing may include:

Electrocardiograms to look for underlying heart disease, and are commonly done for either all department members, or firefighters over age 40.

Blood Testing is often included, looking for medical conditions of the liver, kidneys, blood counts, or high cholesterol risk which may be present.



Taking this mandate a step further, a good medical program is designed to create levels of activity at a fire and to decide the appropriate level, or classification, for each active member of the department. This is based upon a more comprehensive medical history, a complete physical examination, a pulmonary function test, and a determination of vision and hearing capabilities.