



Access
HEALTH SYSTEMS



Firefighter Medical Testing

News for Access Health Systems Customers

Mandatory Testing

Purpose

Medical Surveillance Examinations for firefighters have become part of the routine over the past few years. It is important to look at any program which a department sets up in terms of the purpose of the examination and any goals which the program is trying to achieve.

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.

Fitness for Duty

Viewing a fully involved structural fire as a hazardous workplace, the NFPA in its standard 1582 set out guidelines for physical qualifications for performing such duties. In 1995, 15 firefighters lost their lives fighting fires, while 9 lives were lost in 1996. Many of these instances result from heart attacks in the line of duty. 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. To this end, a good program is designed to create levels of activity at a fire and to decide the appropriate level for each active member of the department.

This is based upon a more **comprehensive medical history, a complete physical examination, a pulmonary function test, determination of vision and hearing capabilities,**

At this point, the medical examiner uses the information to determine if the firefighter is capable of Internal Structural duties (our Category A), External duties (our Category B),

Low exertion duties such as Fire Police (our Category C), and social or administrative duties only (our Category D).

Additional Testing

In this environment of heightened liability, and looking at the physical demands and exposures of a fully involved structural fire, 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. Occasionally, a department wants to do a **treadmill stress test** as the ultimate in on site testing. These programs often turn up medical conditions which may not limit firefighting duties, but which may prevent further health difficulties.

Additional Services

Tetanus, Hepatitis B, TB, and Flu vaccinations are common add ons, as are the various training programs. **Fit testing** of Respiratory devices is often included. Some companies have considered **drug and alcohol testing** programs as well.

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