

## On-Duty Firefighter Fatality Notifications

Notifications for current year on-duty firefighter fatalities can now be made to the United States Fire Administration (USFA) online by using the notification form on the newly redesigned USFA Web site (<http://www.usfa.fema.gov/applications/ffmem/notification.jsp>). All notifications are also sent to the National Fallen Firefighter Memorial Foundation for separate Line of Duty Death (LODD) criteria evaluation (<http://www.usfa.fema.gov/fatalities/memorial/criteria.shtm>).

The fatality notices posted at the grounds of the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial and on the USFA Web site immediately after a firefighter's death are for notification purposes only.

For on-duty deaths reported to USFA immediately following the fatal incident, a notice will be posted and the flags flown at half-staff at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial. The name will also be added to the Firefighter Memorial Database (<http://www.usfa.fema.gov/fatalities/>).

For deaths reported some time after the incident, a file will be created for later investigation. A notice will not be posted at the Memorial or on the Firefighter Memorial Database.

The appearance of a firefighter's name on the Firefighter Memorial Database or the Memorial grounds does not necessarily reflect his/her eligibility for permanent placement on the Memorial or inclusion in the annual USFA report on fatalities. Only after information concerning the fatal incident is collected and reviewed are firefighters deemed eligible/ineligible for either the annual analysis report on firefighter fatalities or for permanent placement on the Memorial. Initial reports are often incomplete. Notices are meant simply as a way to inform the fire service community and the general public of the death. Posted deaths need only be linked to on-duty incidents. No immediate determination of eligibility is made.

### Who is a Firefighter?

For the purpose of the USFA study, the term "firefighter" covers all members of organized fire departments in all States, the District of Columbia, and the Territories of Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Guam. It includes career and volunteer firefighters; full-time public safety officers acting as firefighters; State, Territory, and Federal government fire service personnel, including wildland firefighters; and privately employed firefighters, including employees of contract fire departments and trained members of industrial fire brigades, whether full- or part-time. It also includes contract personnel working as firefighters or assigned to work in direct support of fire service organizations.

Under this definition, the study includes not only local and municipal firefighters but also seasonal and full-time employees of the United States Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Fish and Wildlife, the National Park Service, and State wildland agencies. The definition also includes prison inmates serving on firefighting crews; firefighters employed by other governmental agencies, such as the United States Department of Energy; military personnel performing assigned fire suppression activities; and civilian firefighters working at military installations.

### What Constitutes an On-Duty Fatality?

On-duty fatalities include any injury or illness sustained while on-duty that proves fatal. The term on-duty refers to being involved in operations at the scene of an emergency, whether it is a fire or non fire incident; responding to or returning from an incident; performing other officially assigned duties such as training, maintenance, public education, inspection, investigations, court testimony, and fundraising; and being on-call, under orders, or on standby duty except at the individual's home or place of business. An individual who experiences a heart attack or other fatal injury at home as he or she prepares to respond to an emergency is considered on duty when the response begins. A firefighter who becomes ill while performing fire department duties and suffers a heart attack shortly after arriving home or at another location may be considered on-duty since the inception of the heart attack occurred while the firefighter was on-duty.

There is no established mechanism for identifying fatalities that result from illnesses such as cancer that develop over long periods of time, which may be related to occupational exposure to hazardous materials or products of combustion. It has proved to be very difficult over the years to provide a complete evaluation of an occupational illness as a causal factor in firefighter deaths due to the following limitations: insufficient tracking of the exposure of firefighters to toxic hazards, the often delayed long-term effects of such toxic hazard exposures, and the exposures firefighters may receive while off-duty.

On December 15, 2003, the President of the United States signed into law the Hometown Heroes Survivors Benefit Act of 2003. After being signed by the President, the Act became Public Law 108-182. The law presumes that a heart attack or stroke are in the line-of-duty if the firefighter was engaged in non-routine stressful or strenuous physical activity while on-duty and the firefighter becomes ill while on-duty or within 24 hours after engaging in such activity. The full text of the law is available at:

[http://frWebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=108\\_cong\\_public\\_laws&docid=f:publ182.108.pdf](http://frWebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=108_cong_public_laws&docid=f:publ182.108.pdf)

The inclusion criteria for the USFA study will be affected by this change in the law. Previous to December 15, 2003, firefighters who became ill as the result of a heart attack or stroke after going off-duty needed to register some complaint of not feeling well while still on-duty in order to be included in the study. For firefighter fatalities after December 15, 2003, firefighters will be included in the study if they become ill as the result of a heart attack or stroke within 24 hours of a training activity or emergency response. Firefighters who become ill after going off-duty where the activities while on-duty were limited to non-stressful tasks that did not involve physical exertion such as clerical, administrative, or non-manual in nature, will not be included in the USFA study.

A fatality may be caused directly by an accidental or intentional injury in either emergency or non-emergency circumstances, or it may be attributed to an occupationally-related fatal illness. A common example of a fatal illness incurred on duty is a heart attack. Fatalities attributed to occupational illnesses also would include a communicable disease contracted while on duty that proved fatal when the disease could be attributed to a documented occupational exposure.

Injuries and illnesses are included even when death is considerably delayed after the original incident. When the incident and the death occur in different years, the USFA analysis counts the fatality as having occurred in the year in which the incident took place.

#### Background

For 27 years, the United States Fire Administration (USFA) has tracked the number of firefighter fatalities and conducted an annual analysis. Through the collection of information on the causes

of firefighter deaths, the USFA is able to focus on specific problems and direct efforts toward finding solutions to reduce the number of firefighter fatalities in the future. This information also is used to measure the effectiveness of current programs directed toward firefighter health and safety.

One of the USFA's main program goals is a 25-percent reduction in firefighter fatalities in 5 years, and a 50-percent reduction within 10 years. The emphasis placed on these goals by the USFA is underscored by the fact that these goals represent one of the five major objectives that guide the actions of the USFA.

In addition to the analysis, the USFA provides a list of firefighter fatalities to the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation. If Memorial criteria are met, the fallen firefighter's next of kin, as well as members of the individual fire department, are invited to the annual Fallen Firefighters Memorial Service. The service is held at the National Emergency Training Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland, during Fire Prevention Week.

Additional information regarding the Memorial Service can be found at [www.firehero.org](http://www.firehero.org) or by calling the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation at (301) 447-1365.

Other resources and information regarding firefighter fatalities, including current fatality notices, the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial database, and links to the Public Safety Officer's Benefit (PSOB) program and NIOSH firefighter fatality reports can be found at <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/fatalities/>