



## ***Polk County Professional Firefighters - Local 3531***

**P.O. Box 998 Highland City, Florida 33846-998**

**Office: (863) 585-8301**

*Jeff Calcutt*  
President

*Danny Washington*  
Vice-President

*Jay Schwartz*  
Treasurer

*Heather Coburn*  
Secretary

*Jeremiah Gilley*  
Grievance Chairman

---

IAFF Local 3531 is submitting this letter to explain why our Polk County Fire Rescue firefighters need a more comprehensive annual physical examination. A firefighter is often the first person on the scene of some of the most disturbing and devastating events in people's lives. This may include the death of a child, homicide, suicide, rape, child abuse, family violence, drowning, fatal car accidents and acts of terrorism. They also wear heavy and restrictive clothing, carry awkward equipment and work in dangerous environments. Firefighters often enter buildings in smoky and hot conditions and may even hang from buildings and perform high angle rescues. They also handle situations involving hazardous materials that could include biological, chemical and nuclear agents.

These high-levels of stress, physical demands and long-term exposure to chemicals and infectious disease can take their toll on the health of firefighters and especially to their cardiovascular system. This intense work in environments of high heat, low oxygen, high carbon monoxide and other combustible products often produces a maximum heart response. These and other risks are what account for nearly 50% of fire ground deaths being heart-related," (*New England Journal of Medicine*, March 07). Cardiovascular, respiratory and thermoregulatory strain on firefighters is profound, increasing the odds of heart attack from 12-126 times while fire fighting. Cancer is also another hazard of the job. An analysis of 32 studies published in the *Journal of Emergency Medicine* in 2006 showed that many cancers were significantly associated with firefighting. These included testicular (highest risk), multiple myeloma, malignant melanoma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, prostate, skin, brain, rectum, pharynx, stomach, colon and leukemia. The University of Cincinnati conducted a study in 2009 where researchers revealed that firefighters developed 10 types of Cancer more frequently than any other occupation. The most virulent was testicular cancer. Firefighters also face a 53% greater risk of contracting Multiple Myeloma, which is a deadly cancer that attacks bone marrow. When a firefighter sweats, it opens the pores on all areas of the skin, which includes the arm pits, groin, neck, jaw angle, and scalp. Chemicals then utilize these areas to travel into the bloodstream, attacking the body's blood cells.

*Associated with the International Association of Fire Fighters and Florida Professional Fire Fighters*

The most common types of cancer and increased risks to firefighters are: Testicular-102%, Multiple Myeloma-53%, Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma-51%, Skin-39%, Brain-32%, Prostate-28%, Stomach-22%, and Colon-Rectal-21%.

Because of the physical nature of their work, firefighters are also at a significant risk for musculoskeletal injury with back injury being the highest reported, followed by the upper and lower extremities. In a given year, the IAFF Death and Injury Survey indicates that one out of every five firefighters will die or be injured in the line of duty, so prevention and proper rehab is essential. That is why the *International Associations of Fire Chiefs and International Association of Fire Fighters* recommend that firefighters should be monitored for long term effects of the working environment, including exposure to chemical and biological agents and disease patterns that might indicate work-related health concerns.

Therefore, it would be ideal for our Polk County Fire Rescue firefighters to have a comprehensive NFPA 1582 yearly medical exam performed by a company that specializes in and has vast knowledge of NFPA 1582 physicals that would include the following: head to toe physical exam per NFPA 1582, vital signs, skin cancer screening, visual acuity test, hearing exam, breast exam, lab work, personal consultation with review of testing results at physical appointment, recommendations for medical intervention & behavioral modification changes, cardiac assessment to include: Echocardiogram, resting EKG, cardiac treadmill stress test with V02 max calculation (Bruce Protocol), carotid arteries ultrasound, aortic aneurysm ultrasound, cancer and disease assessment to include, thyroid ultrasound, liver, pancreas, gall bladder, spleen, & kidney ultrasounds, bladder ultrasound, pelvic ultrasound for women (external), testicular ultrasound for men, laboratory blood tests to include: thyroid panel, occult blood screen, PSA for men (prostate cancer marker), CA-125 for women (ovarian cancer marker), lipid panel, diabetes tests (glucose and hemoglobin A1C), pulmonary function test, urinalysis with chem strip, complete blood count (hemogram with diff), comprehensive metabolic panel (CMP), OSHA respirator medical clearance, fitness program (NFPA 1582 Guidelines) to include: fitness and agility evaluation, body composition analysis, stretching/flexibility/endurance analysis, nutrition and diet recommendations, personal fitness recommendations, medical clearances to include: OSHA respirator medical clearance, Hep B antibody screening, Hep B Antigen (titer), Hep C Screening, and TB Test (interferon).

The Union is presenting this request after having determined our current physical process was not covering some of the most important health risks of our occupation. Early detection is the key in reducing the mortality rate and providing our firefighters with a comprehensive look at the occupational hazards we face everyday working as firefighters. While studying the differences in the (Polk County Employee) Wellness Center physical and a Life Scan physical, it was determined that a Lifescan physical can be performed in a more efficient manner and with an eventual cost savings to the county's general fund by reducing short term and long-term health care costs. Life Scan will come to any location we set and perform comprehensive NFPA 1582 physicals at a rate of nine firefighters a day or forty-five a week. Life Scan will complete all firefighter physicals within a two-month time frame. All physicals will be completed while on duty, thus saving the two hours of overtime now paid to firefighters for the Wellness Center process.

The Polk County Employee Clinic physicals have had and will continue to have a negative effect on the county's general fund and do nothing to help early detection of life changing catastrophic illnesses that could affect our firefighters, their families and co-workers. As you can see, not only does this have a negative impact on our firefighters lives but it also has a negative impact on the long-term cost of health care for the County. It has been shown that early detection of serious illnesses can have a smaller impact on claims and reduce the mortality rate.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and for your efforts in optimizing the health of our Polk County Fire Rescue firefighters.