



Department of Commerce

Division of State Fire Marshal

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Preventing Heat Stress for Firefighters

As temperatures soar each summer, firefighters face a new, very dangerous risk – heat stress.

Hot weather can lead to firefighters experiencing heat cramps (involuntary muscle contractions), heat exhaustion (weakness, fatigue, nausea) or heat stroke (extreme elevations in body temperature). Heat can also increase the risk of firefighter injuries as it may result in sweaty palms, fogged-up safety glasses and dizziness. Burns may also occur as a result of accidental contact with hot surfaces or steam.

According to the Center for Disease Control, workers at greater risk of heat stress include those who are 65 years of age or older, are overweight, have heart disease or high blood pressure, or take medications that may be affected by extreme heat.

NFPA 1584 outlines the standards for firefighters in preventing heat stress and rehabilitating on the scene.

Recommendations for firefighters:

- Drink water frequently. Drink enough water that you never become thirsty. You should start drinking water before your shift begins and continue to drink water following your shift.
- Wear breathable, loose fitting clothing such as cotton t-shirts and under garments to help sweat evaporate. Avoid non-breathing synthetic clothing.
- Gradually build up to heavy work to become acclimated to the hotter weather.
- Schedule training, when possible, during the coolest parts of day.
- Take more breaks in extreme heat and humidity.
- Avoid drinks with caffeine, alcohol, and large amounts of sugar.
- Be aware that protective clothing or personal protective equipment may increase the risk of heat stress.
- Monitor your physical condition and that of your coworkers. Always train and work with a fellow firefighter or paramedic and keep an eye out for each other.

U.S. Military Heat Index Calculator:

http://www.eustis.army.mil/weather/weather_products/wxconversions.htm#HeatIndex

