

HEALTH AND WELLNESS OF WOMEN FIREFIGHTERS



National Development and Research Institutes, Inc.

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PURPOSE AND AIMS: While firefighter health research has experienced exponential growth over the past decade, the published literature has focused almost exclusively on males. The lack of data on how firefighting impacts women has been hypothesized to negatively impact recruitment, retention, and job satisfaction. Particularly lacking are details about female-specific health concerns (e.g. reproductive cancers, reproductive health, safety of breastfeeding). We also address other critical areas of concern including cancer, injury, and behavioral health issues among both career and volunteer female firefighters.

RELEVANCE: The low number of and difficulty accessing women in the fire service has resulted in almost no information on female firefighters, despite evidence that significant gender-specific health concerns exist. Fire service leadership and health care professionals have no data on which to base important decisions about how to protect the health and safety of women in their departments. This study is the first step toward addressing this gap and correcting a critical omission.

METHODS: Data will be collected as part of a longitudinal cohort study of critical issues as well as a chemical analysis of breastmilk. Based on these data, an expert panel will develop model policies and recommendations for protecting the health and safety of women in the fire service.

PROJECTED RESULTS & CONCLUSIONS: This study will result in foundational data on the health and safety of female firefighters and will develop model policy and practice recommendations for fire departments. The information from this research will provide an empirical foundation for decisions by both firefighters and management on appropriate measures to protect the health of current and future female firefighters.