

NVFC Establishes Volunteer Firefighter Health and Safety Priorities to Keep First Responders at their B.E.S.T.

The health and safety of our nation's volunteer fire service is a primary concern for the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC). Each year, first responders are killed or injured due to factors that could have been avoided with the proper safety and health precautions. To help keep firefighters and emergency personnel strong and prevent tragedies, the NVFC has released a series of health and safety priorities to more effectively address the critical health and safety issues impacting the volunteer fire service.

The NVFC has always been active in promoting and implementing initiatives to keep first responders healthy and safe. This includes launching the Heart-Healthy Firefighter Program in 2003 to proactively combat the leading cause of line-of-duty firefighter deaths – heart attack. In addition, the NVFC teamed up with the United States Fire Administration to address the second leading cause of firefighter fatalities with the Emergency Vehicle Safe Operations for Volunteer and Small Combination Emergency Service Organizations program.

Building on these and other efforts to protect first responders, the NVFC Board of Directors established a Health and Safety Committee in the spring of 2008 to further the NVFC's initiatives in the areas of health and safety. The Committee produced the Volunteer Firefighter Health and Safety Priorities to provide departments with guidance on key issues that need to be addressed in order to keep department members safe and eliminate cases of preventable injury and death.

The Volunteer Firefighter Health and Safety Priorities are set forth in a series of B.E.S.T. practices for the volunteer fire and emergency services, divided into four main focus areas. The priorities are as follows:

Behavior

- Support the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of all personnel.
- Operate all emergency apparatus and privately owned vehicles to conform to the highest road safety standards and enforce the use of seatbelts.
- Develop, practice, and enforce recommended health and safety standards for all personnel.
- Monitor and ensure that all active emergency scenes maintain the utmost level of safety and fireground accountability.

Equipment

- Provide and require the proper use of full personal protective equipment.
- Maintain all equipment based on established safety recommendations.

Standards

- Encourage the use of all smoke, fire detection, and fire suppression devices, including fire sprinkler systems, in all structures.
- Vigorously enforce all fire safety codes and ordinances.

- Obtain apparatus and equipment that meet national safety standards.

Training

- Utilize fire training programs that conform to the highest professional standards.
- Operate a safe fire training ground at all times.
- Establish, maintain, and deliver fire safety programs for all age groups.

These priorities will guide the direction of the NVFC's initiatives to keep first responders safe and healthy. The NVFC highly encourages departments to adopt and adhere to the B.E.S.T. Practices to protect their personnel from harm.

In June 2009, the NVFC conducted a national mailing, with the support of Provident Agency, to distribute posters with the Volunteer Firefighter Health and Safety Priorities to every department in the country. Departments should hang the poster up at the station to keep the priorities in the minds of their personnel and serve as a constant reminder of the B.E.S.T. practices they should be following to keep their members safe. Departments can also download the poster at www.nvfc.org/health_safety or order additional hard copies from the NVFC office at 1-888-ASK-NVFC (275-6832) or nvffoffice@nvfc.org.

Further information and resources on each of the priority focus areas are available at www.nvfc.org/health_safety. In the coming months, the NVFC will also be releasing a series of articles that further explores each of the points in the B.E.S.T. practices.

The health and safety of our nation's first responders is too important to ignore. Join the NVFC in promoting and adopting the Volunteer Firefighter Health and Safety Priorities so that every member of the fire service can be at their B.E.S.T.