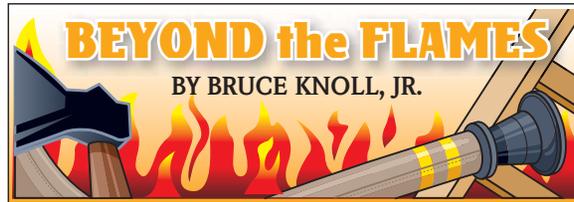


New Study Shows Firefighter Cancer Rates Higher than U.S. Average

A new study released last week by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has confirmed the long-believed notion that the likelihood of firefighters contracting cancer are a significantly higher rate than the general population.

“Mortality and Cancer Incidence in a Pooled Cohort of US Firefighters From San Francisco, Chicago And Philadelphia (1950–2009),” the study that was jointly conducted by NIOSH, The National Cancer Center, and the University of California-Davis provides the most comprehensive information to date on the rise of cancer in the fire services, some types that have seen instances of a condition two times higher than the



U.S. average.

The results of the study were published in the Journal for Occupational and Environmental Medicine and are a compilation of the data gathered from largest pool of subjects ever used to research the topic of firefighter cancer rates.

30,000 career firefighters from Chicago, Philadelphia, and San Francisco whose years of service spanned from as early as 1950 to as late as 2011 were



used in the study. The researchers cited several previous studies that were completed on a much smaller scale and lacked the diversity of this study’s observation pool.

The study examined cancer rates in 41 different diagnosed ailments and compared the rates of those ailments in firefighters to the general population of the United States. Researchers found that

overall, firefighters were on average in the area of 1.5 times more likely to contract the ailments than those in similar age groups not performing firefighting duties.

Among those ailments, the report found the highest likelihood of cancer to be amongst the respiratory, digestive, and urinary systems, citing several reasons for the elevated risks in this category, including increased exposure to toxic smoke and burning materials as well as the prevalence of tobacco and alcohol use amongst career firefighters.

The study is also the first on the topic to find significant evidence that firefighters are at an increased risk to contract complications

from asbestos exposure than the U.S. average. In fact, the study stated that those in the fire service are over two times more likely to contract mesothelioma, a direct result of elevated levels of asbestos exposure.

While the study exposed a number of discouraging figures for the fire service, it did find that firefighters are less likely to suffer from non-malignant forms of cancer than the national average. Researchers cited firefighters’ increased likelihood to have a higher level of healthiness than the average American as a likely factor for the decreased chances.

The United States Fire Administration and NIOSH announced at the conclusion of the study that they

plan to allocate funding to further continue the research regarding cancer in the fire service, with the next step in research including a more detailed look into subjects’ occupational histories (including types of number of fire runs) as well as subjects’ institutional knowledge and compliance in regards to the use of respiratory protection and source capture ventilation of diesel exhaust. Women and non-Caucasian subjects will also be more prominently featured in further studies, they said.

Knoll, 21, of Eldora, can be contacted by email at beyondtheflamescmc@gmail.com. He is a student at Rowan University.