



KNOWLEDGE OF DANGEROUS EXPOSURES AND STEPS FOR PROTECTION BY: SCOTT O'MARA

Awareness as to the unique exposures that occur in certain employment situations such as being a firefighter, peace officer (police officer, deputy sheriff, highway patrol or other safety members) is a necessity. These exposures can lead to significant medical problems and impact one's ability to continue in that chosen career and can lead to challenging medical treatment that is necessary to maintain a comfortable way of life.

The exposures can be factors that are not recognized initially to cause harm by a particular element of employment. But as time evolves the art of science is able to identify these unique exposures and the increased likelihood of additional medical problems that can evolve.

The medical problems can be specific such as cancer, or other ongoing medical conditions such as COVID-19, that can be made more pronounced by certain unique exposures.

One of the subjects that are being examined in depth is PFAS, and this product is known as Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOA), another product close related one is Perfluorooctan Sulfonate (PFOS). Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF) have both of these materials and can expose the safety member through specific events such as firefighting; officers responding to auto accidents, directing traffic, etc. The products of PFOA, PFOS found in AFFF have been linked by studies to cancer and making other ongoing medical conditions more complex.

The interaction between PFAS and COVID-19 may increase the risk of infection from COVID-19. There are other medical conditions that are thought to be impacted by a PFAS, PFOA (AFFF).

These factors are elements that some doctors understand and speak to etiology. Other doctors may just be focused on to the diagnoses and looking for a more common factor of causation, and do not examine the other element if PFOA and PFOS impacted on the other medical condition.

The harmful health effects have been seen in changing liver enzymes, change of cholesterol levels, increase in the risk of high blood pressure, ulcerative colitis, thyroid disease, lower immune system, cancer and lung disease.

It is also thought to potentially have an impact on the vaccine that children receive and minimize the protectiveness of the vaccine.

The awareness that society is developing goes back to other exposures that have existed. Post the 09-11-2001 attack, there was a change in the evaluation that occurred and there was a creation of what is called The World Trade Center Health Registry. The registry was, and is, a research vehicle for the long-term effects (physically and mentally) of the attack of 09/11/2001.

Also, there was legislation passed/signed on 07/07/2018 creating the Firefighter Cancer Registry Act of 2018. The Registry is voluntary, the firefighters provide relevant health and occupational information, and compare the exposures they have had to determine cancer incidents. This helps establish there was a relationship of increased cancer trends among firefighters.

The Registry (The World Trade Center Health Registry) that established post the 09/11/2001 horrific event also has provided information as to exposures and risk factors.

The information garnered helps in many ways. They identify exposures that do carry these risk factors and try to minimize the exposures. The other is to have a review analysis done of the workers that have these exposures so the medical problems (such as cancers) can be more readily discovered.

Safety members (firefighters, peace officers) have exposures that are unique in comparison to the general population. They experience exposure to smoke and hazardous chemicals that occur in structural fires, vehicle fires and wild land fires. The content of the fire not only goes into their lungs/pulmonary system, but also into their clothing which penetrates the skin.

The first in depth study, The World Trade Center Health Registry, assisted in tracking and investigating possible trends, illnesses and recovery. The signature on the Firefighter Cancer Act of 2018 is by the President, again is acknowledgement that the federal government is aware of the risk and harm. This acknowledgement is to be transferred to the changing of work conditions such as minimizing the exposures by providing ample time post fighting a fire to bathe to remove particulates from one's body and be in a position to have their clothing cleaned so the clothing items are not on a continuum exposing the safety officer, and potentially their family to these harmful substances that occur.

The health awareness of the safety member is paramount for a society. To achieve that we need to continue to have the studies that are obtained by the volunteer registry for firefighters and cancer incidents. The worker, whether a firefighter, peace officer, police officer, deputy sheriff, highway patrol officer, must be aware that they can take additional steps to minimize their exposure by cleaning/bathing and watching for symptomology of the type of medical problems that are caused by the exposures of smoke and hazardous chemicals that they have had throughout their work situation. There has been some reluctance in the past to provide time for safety members to clean themselves and their apparel post the exposure. This has changed to a small degree. This needs to continue so that there is ample time to clean up post these exposures. In addition to that, there is now recognition of the need for cleaning vehicles, whether a fire truck or car. Those vehicles also have particulates left, and those need to be cleaned to minimize these exposures.

KNOWLEDGE of the DANGEROUS EXPOSURES is a strong tool to protect the safety members and their families, and by providing this protection they are in a position to protect the rest of the society, more changes and updates are needed. Previous articles discussing this and COVID-19 exposures are set forth in Newsletter Law1199 2021 # 7 and Newsletter Law1199 2022 # 3.



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