

Firefighters guidance note #6-XX: Hygiene and decontamination

Reducing firefighter exposure to contaminants through the use of good hygiene and decontamination practices.

Issued: December 2017

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Background

Firefighters, in the course of their duties, may be exposed to contaminants during training exercises or emergencies.

Concerns/hazards

Firefighters' protective clothing and equipment become contaminated by contact with hazardous substances or the products of combustion and decomposition at the fire scene. When handling these items, airborne exposure to these contaminants can result, as well as exposure through contact with the skin. Engineering controls (ventilation), decontamination procedures, personal protective equipment (respiratory protection devices, gloves) and hygiene practices need to be implemented.

Actions for employers

Employers should:

- develop a program of decontamination, which includes engineering controls (ventilation), decontamination procedures, personal protective equipment (respiratory protection devices, gloves) and hygiene practices, in consultation with the joint health and safety committee

Handling soiled or contaminated equipment

Proper instruction, training and decontamination procedures can reduce illness among fire personnel.

Decontaminate all equipment used at a fire scene. This includes associated equipment (such as fire hoses and pumps), bunker gear and personal protective equipment (such as respiratory protection devices, gloves and boots).

Carrying these items in the cabs of fire department apparatus or in personal vehicles may be hazardous due to the off gassing and presence of toxins and carcinogens.

Soiled or contaminated equipment should **not** be:

- transported inside the cabs of fire department vehicles
- transported inside a personal vehicle
- taken into the living quarters of a fire station
- taken into the firefighter's home

Clean equipment and wash personal clothing after training or responding to an incident where equipment has been contaminated. Follow field decontamination procedures.

Appropriate facilities and equipment should be readily available to quickly clean and decontaminate firefighting equipment.

Hygiene and decontamination program

The following elements should be part of your hygiene and decontamination program:

- procedures for dealing with contaminated personal protective equipment, self-contained breathing apparatus and any other firefighting equipment at a training centre or emergency scene
- steps for initial decontamination of fire personnel at a training centre or emergency scene
- safety precautions and protective equipment to be worn when cleaning equipment or vehicles
- procedures for showering and changing clothes once personnel return to the station
- establish areas within the fire station that contaminated equipment should not enter
- review the manufacturer's procedures and instructions for the use of extractors and washing machines for all PPE
- designate an area to store clean bunker gear, PPE and fire equipment

Applicable regulations, acts and standards

Read:

- [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#)
 - clause 25(1)(b) for maintaining equipment in good condition
 - clause 25(2)(a) for providing information and instruction to a worker
 - clause 25(2)(d) for making workers aware of hazards
 - clause 25(2)(e) for consulting with the Joint Health and Safety Committee or Health and Safety Representative
 - clause 25(2)(h) for taking every precaution reasonable to protect workers
 - *Regulation 833 – [Control of Exposure to Biological or Chemical Agents](#)*
 - *O. Reg. 278/05 – [Designated Substance - Asbestos on Construction Projects and in Buildings and Repair Operations](#)*
 - *O. Reg. 490/09 - [Designated Substances](#)*
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Related

NFPA 1971, [Standard on Protective Ensembles for Structural Fire Fighting and Proximity Fire Fighting](#) for requirements for structural firefighting protective garments manufactured on or after March 1, 2007

[NFPA 1851 Standard on Selection, Care and Maintenance of Protective Ensembles for Structural Fire Fighting and Proximity Fire Fighting](#) for guidance on the selection, care, and maintenance of firefighting protective ensembles to reduce health and safety risks associated with improper maintenance, contamination, or damage

Guidance note 4-8 Care, maintenance, inspection and replacement of structural firefighting personal protective equipment

This resource does not replace the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) and its regulations, and should not be used as or considered legal advice. Health and safety inspectors apply the law based on the facts in the workplace.