

Firefighters guidance note #6-XX: Medication and drug exposure

Preventing firefighter exposure to hazardous medications or drugs.

Issued: December 2017

On this page

1. Background
2. Concerns/hazards
3. Actions for employers
4. Safety considerations for medication or drug exposure
5. Training considerations
6. Applicable regulations, acts and standards
7. Related

Background

Firefighters, in the course of their duties, may be exposed to medication(s) and/or drug(s) in various forms from contact with:

- persons suffering from accidental or intentional overdoses of prescription medication, non-prescription medication or illicit drugs
- equipment or being within a building used in the drug manufacturing process

Concerns/hazards

Medications and drugs that pose potential risks include, but are not limited to chemotherapy medication, opioids and methamphetamine. The risk of exposure may occur through contact

with a visibly contaminated patient, direct contact with the medication/drug or contact with equipment or being within a building used in the drug manufacturing process.

Actions for employers

Employers should:

- develop processes to ensure the protection of firefighters from hazardous exposures to drugs and medications

Safety considerations for medication or drug exposure

Employers should consider the following, when developing processes to prevent firefighter exposure:

- training on recognizing and determining risks, and taking actions appropriate to manage the level of risk
- creation of standard operating guidelines to manage exposure to drugs
- direct firefighters not to handle any medications/drugs or drug paraphernalia, unless necessary to perform a rescue
- direct firefighters to treat unknown/unidentified substances as hazardous materials and follow any established departmental hazardous materials guidelines
- safety precautions and personal protective equipment to be used, as appropriate to the level of risk, when responding to high risk incidents
- decontamination process for personnel who may be exposed
- reporting protocols for exposures

Training considerations

Training should include, but not be limited to the following:

- processes addressing the considerations noted in the paragraph above
- types of medications and drugs that may be encountered and how to identify them
- the proper selection and use of personal protective equipment during emergency incidents to prevent exposure

- how to manage exposure should it occur
- reporting protocols for exposures

Proper instruction, training, use of personal protective equipment and decontamination assists in reducing the chance of exposure and better enables firefighters to manage exposures.

Applicable regulations, acts and standards

Read:

- [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#)
 - 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)(h) for taking every precaution reasonable to protect workers
 - *Regulation 833 – [Control of Exposure to Biological or Chemical Agents](#)*
 - section 3 for measures to protect workers from exposure to biological or chemical agents
-

Related

Guidance note 6-17 Clandestine drug labs

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.