

March 2010 Newsletter

Together We Can!

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Accentuate the Positives

Firefighter safety needs are no different than what they were a year ago or even five years ago. Nothing much has changed. However, 2009 was a turning point for us in the fire service. We ended up with fewer than 100 line-of-duty deaths (LODDs), a task for what we, and many others, have preached about for many years. Not since 1998 have we done that as a fire service, and it's about time.

A Matter of the Heart

We have all known for quite some time the hazards of firefighting. These hazards include everything from the smoke we breathe to our heart rate elevating from 60 to 120 in a matter of seconds. Ask firefighters what cardiac concerns they have, and the majority of them will list several without stopping to think. The fire service as a whole has continuously addressed these concerns by distributing information and raising awareness. The most notable examples include the International Association of Fire Chief's Fire/EMS Safety, Health, and Survival Week; the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation's *Everyone Goes Home*® program; and even *Fire Engineering's* devoting one theme a year - the December issue - to firefighter health. However, this problem remains the number one killer in the fire service. It does not quite seem to sink in unless it affects us or a colleague.

How the Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives Helped Save My Life

My name is Tom Straub. I am a 36-year member of the New Kensington Volunteer Fire Department in western Pennsylvania. I am also a safety advocate for the *Everyone Goes Home Program*® and a trainer for the *Courage to Be Safe*® course. Little did I know that four years ago the Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives would help set the stage for saving my life.

Rookies and Veterans

Over the years, as a fire service instructor, I have met a lot of fellow firefighters. Recently I realized the stories from rookies and veterans were the same. The rookies said "we don't fit in" and the veterans said, "rookies just don't get it." As a fire service instructor and as a company officer it is my responsibility to teach rookies and veterans on-the-job safety.



INITIATIVE SPOTLIGHT

Spotlighting one of the 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives each month

Initiative #7 - Create a national research agenda and data collection system that relates to the initiatives.

More Information: [16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives](#) | **Share a Resource:** editor@everyonegoeshome.com

Do you have an suggestion for the newsletter? Tell us about it! Please send your comments, articles, or news about what your department is doing to keep firefighters safe to editor@everyonegoeshome.com.

Together We Can!

Fire Chief Freddy Howell **Kings Bay, GA - Everyone Goes Home® State Advocate**

With snow piles lining the perimeter of the beautiful landscape at the National Fire Academy (NFA) in Emmitsburg, Maryland, and the sun high above shining on three beautiful days (March 5-7, 2010), firefighters and fire-related personnel from all over the nation gathered to attend the *Everyone Goes Home®* Safety Summit. This was the second consecutive year that saw an increase in attendance for the Safety Summit. Again, this year, the main goal of the fire service members attending was "saving our own" through the *Everyone Goes Home®* Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives program and to educate and network with other state advocates from across the country. An additional approach to addressing these issues was also presented.

The weekend was filled with education classes and great speakers that ranged from Kelvin Cochran, U.S. Fire Administrator, Dr. Denis Onieal, Superintendent of the National Fire Academy, to a good friend, Howard Cross, and ending with Charlie Dickinson, retired Deputy U.S. Fire Administrator.

An additional idea that was identified as being an effective approach to fire safety is the "Together We Can" team approach to reducing the number of line-of-duty deaths (LODDs) in the fire service. I will share an article that I wrote concerning this very theory. One question in the article was answered in a joint panel discussion held at this year's summit with Janet Wilmoth, *Fire Chief* Magazine editor, Bobby Halton, *Fire Engineering* Magazine editor, Harvey Eisner, *Firehouse* Magazine editor and Timothy E. Sendelbach *Fire Rescue* Magazine editor. Answer: These editors do carefully consider and select the pictures that are on the front covers of their magazines and then give a description of them on the index page of the magazine.

Together we can!

This past year I had the opportunity to be the head coach of a seven and eight year-old football team and, through that experience, I used a phrase that may be recognized from the last presidential election. Political opinions aside, the phrase was a motivating tool that can be used to move others to accomplish a goal no matter what it may be. My goal was to get seven and eight year-old boys to learn to work as one efficient group to win at the game of football. To accomplish this goal, I needed patience and a tool to get these individuals to play together as a team. The tool I found was a phrase that we incorporated into our pre- and post-game pep talks. The phrase was "TOGETHER WE CAN"! During the football season, I recognized that coaching football is similar to coaching firefighters. You need a motivational tool, repetitive training, and practice. With that mindset, I thought we should we apply the "Together We Can" phrase to help promote and motivate the safety atmosphere in the fire service so we can reduce the number of LODDs.

By applying the phrase "Together We Can" to the 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives, we can see how it can promote and even motivate a together (team) atmosphere. Let's look at a couple:

1. Together, we can define and advocate the need for a cultural change within the fire service relating to safety; incorporating leadership, management, supervision, accountability and personal responsibility.
2. Together, we can enhance the personal and organizational accountability for health and safety throughout the fire service.

As you can see with these two life safety initiatives, it not only adds a little motivation but it also joins everyone

into one group and identifies who is responsible and gives us the ability to complete our goals. To see this I will break it down:

- **"Together"** - groups the fire service which includes the firefighters, officers, fire chiefs, fire commissioners, public safety directors, fire academies, fire colleges, fire equipment manufactures, salesman of any fire-related product, magazine publishing companies and anyone else who is associated with the fire service directly or indirectly.
- **"We"** - is identifying the group and allowing those individuals to take an active part in "together."
- **"Can"** - describes the physical and mental ability in a positive and motivational way.

One of the first steps is working on the TOGETHER aspect. As previously mentioned, TOGETHER includes all the magazine publishing companies and anyone else who is associated with the fire service. Let's take a look at one of our most valuable resources - the magazine publishing companies. Most fire departments, including ours, subscribe to almost every type of fire service-related magazine or newspaper that is available. If you stop at a fire station, no matter where it is around the country, you will see at least one fire-related magazine lying around. Inside are great articles written by fire professionals and most of them are addressing the Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives in one way or the other. However, on the front cover of some of those magazines, we notice firefighters operating at emergency scenes and occasionally there are countless safety issues we can identify. What is this picture sending to the readers? I know we shouldn't base any book or magazine on its cover, but if the old saying is correct "a picture is worth a thousand words" then the first impression and the first thousand words a reader receives doesn't always reflect what they will read inside. We, as an industry, have got to be TOGETHER with our message and be consistent. We cannot write one thing and show pictures of the opposite.

I hope the magazine publishing companies don't take offense I just want to show how we need to be TOGETHER in every aspect of the fire service and, as we are all familiar with the publications. Perhaps Henry Ford said it best: "Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success." Together we can reduce LODDs!

A Matter of the Heart

Brian Ward

Gwinnett County Fire and Emergency Services

Published in *Fire Engineering*, December 2009

We have all known for quite some time the hazards of firefighting. These hazards include everything from the smoke we breathe to our heart rate elevating from 60 to 120 in a matter of seconds. Ask firefighters what cardiac concerns they have, and the majority of them will list several without stopping to think. The fire service as a whole has continuously addressed these concerns by distributing information and raising awareness. The most notable examples include the International Association of Fire Chief's Fire/EMS Safety, Health, and Survival Week; the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation's *Everyone Goes Home*® program; and even *Fire Engineering's* devoting one theme a year - the December issue - to firefighter health. However, this problem remains the number one killer in the fire service. It does not quite seem to sink in unless it affects us or a colleague.

In 2003, members of the Gwinnett County (GA) Fire and Emergency Services (GCFES) received a severe blow when we suffered the loss of one of our own. While operating on the roof of a commercial structure fire, Lieutenant Bobby Patrick suffered a fatal heart attack. He was a well-respected and healthy 53-year-old firefighter with no known cardiac disease. His photo, in every firehouse and a neighborhood elementary school named after him, serve as reminders of what can happen in this occupation even when everything else is going right. No fire department wants to experience this and its impact - which reaches from the crew to the family to the morale of the entire department. In response, the GCFES Command Staff and Retired Chief Steve Rolader began establishing parameters to prevent the repeat of such an incident.

Firefighter Heart Study

In 2008, the GCFES received a federally funded grant for the Firefighter and Heart Disease Program Study. H. Robert Superko, MD, FACC, Executive Director for the Translational Research Institute and Center for Genomics and Human Health at Saint Joseph's Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia, oversaw the research. The effort began as an attempt to develop and conduct research studies that identify patients' genetic susceptibility to heart disease, cancer, and other chronic disease states and, most importantly, translate those findings into individualized treatment programs based on the person's unique genetic makeup. Nicolas Chronos, MD, President of the Translational Research Institute, describes an interesting aspect of this research as being able to develop future treatment protocols that are tailored specifically for an individual's genetic makeup and the makeup of his specific disease.

The research group was comprised of 300 volunteers over the age of 36 who performed firefighting operations. Superko and his colleagues performed a free comprehensive cardiac exam on each individual. He was looking specifically at newly identified KIF6 (statin responsiveness gene), 9p21 (myocardial infarction gene), advanced phenotype (blood), and imaging analyses, diet, and exercise review over the year-long study. Every individual received the results and a consultation with St. Joseph's doctors and nurses. Also, any individual identified to be in the top 50 percent risk category was immediately notified.

Preliminary Results

After reviewing the results, Superko estimated that firefighters are at a 300 percent increased risk over the

average citizen of developing cardiac disease. He said, "Preliminary findings show that one-third of firefighters had heart disease that is unrelated to traditional risk factors, such as high cholesterol. Those results are astounding and point at job duties and environment as the primary determinants for early death in our country's first responders." He continued, "Stress and psychological pressures related to the job, as well as diet, exercise issues, and inherent personality, interacting with a genetic predisposition to heart disease, probably have tremendous impact on the risk of heart attack in these first responders." Superko hoped to unveil further analysis of his results at the Annual American Heart Association meeting in November.

Three Firefighters Saved

More important than any other results from this study, the study saved the lives of three firefighters. During the extensive cardiac exams, these individuals were identified as needing immediate surgical intervention. This was not a long-term problem identified that was a matter of months or years but rather hours and days. The doctors were able to prevent further heart damage and extend the lives of these individuals. This was an eye-opening experience for many people including myself. However, to look around my department and to think for just a moment that three of my fellow firefighters may not be here today is quite disturbing. The thought hits very close to home when you put it that way.

Many departments have lost firefighters to cardiac disease, as it is the most frequent cause of line-of-duty deaths in the fire service. How many other firefighters are in this same position right now but do not realize it? How many firefighters do you know who have missed enjoying retirement past their first year because of cardiac disease?

Prevention

Knowing these concerns and the hazards that firefighters face, the GCFES developed the Fire Fit Living Committee to aid in developing several incentives and programs for employees. The incentives have included reimbursements for gym memberships, workout equipment in each station, and a monthly newsletter "The Risk Factor." A web page of the county web site has been dedicated to Fire Fit Living and topics such as motivation, nutritional advice, resources, stress management, success stories, exercise and fitness, and health and wellness.

In addition, regular programs such as Lunch and Learn have been established. At Lunch and Learn, guest speakers cover health topics during a catered healthy snack or lunch. A Risk Management Division has been established to cover a wide array of topics and includes a certified personal trainer to offer workout and nutrition advice. In addition, several personal trainers are spread throughout the department. Another aspect of the Risk Management Division and directly related to Superko's earlier comments is the implementation of our critical incident stress debriefing team. The team assists firefighters with reducing stress and handling the psychological demands of the occupation.

Department members are also encouraged to participate in our Annual 5-Alarm 5K run/walk and other nearby competitions. One of these competitions, Climb Atlanta, is hosted by the American Lung Association every year in downtown Atlanta. Usually several firefighters compete as a team and individually in the timed 50-story climb to the top. Last year, the number of individuals wishing to compete was overwhelming. In response, Chief Bill Myers and our command staff backfilled the stations to allow these individuals time off to compete. In addition, the entire department receives health-related materials for participating in the Fire/EMS Safety, Health, and Survival Week.

All of these items are great incentives for our employees, but the fire station is not the only place where people need to be more health conscious. In recruit school, where the minds are still impressionable, health consciousness needs to be a major focus. Physical training with regularly scheduled cardiovascular workouts and

CrossFit (www.crossfit.com) exercises are also integrated into the Recruit Program. Lectures are given on proper eating habits, firefighter health issues, and achieving a healthy lifestyle.

If you would like to start some form of a health initiative in your department, there are numerous resources available. Ask your American Heart Association representative for information specifically for first responders. The National Volunteer Fire Council has established www.Healthy-Firefighter.com, which has incentive programs such as the Fired Up for Fitness Challenge. For additional resources, go to www.fireserviceslt/resources.com and scroll down to the "Health" subtitle.

The Bottom Line

The bottom line is that we need to take care of ourselves. Firefighting is dangerous enough without us adding additional hazards. Take the initiative to live a healthier life-if not for yourself than for the individuals in your life that matter the most to you: the little ones at home, your spouse, and your family at the firehouse. Picture the absence of three fellow firefighters from your firehouse. Would your life be altered by one of those deaths? Maybe it's the lieutenant you respect, or the driver who doesn't need a map book, or the firefighter you can always depend on to be there. How different would your life be? Take care of yourself, start with a checkup, eat healthy, and work out a little. That's not asking too much.

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How the Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives Helped Save My Life

Tom Straub
New Kensington Volunteer Fire Department, Pennsylvania

My name is Tom Straub. I am a 36-year member of the New Kensington Volunteer Fire Department in western Pennsylvania. I am also a safety advocate for the *Everyone Goes Home Program*® and a trainer for the *Courage to Be Safe*® course. Little did I know that four years ago the Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives would help set the stage for saving my life. My story follows:

Four years ago, based on the publication of the Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives, our department applied for and was fortunate enough to receive an AFG grant for a Firefighter Health, Fitness, and Wellness program. As part of the grant, we were able to offer our firefighters a full slate of medical tests and screenings giving our department a starting baseline. Since it was only a one-year grant, following the initial screenings, we recommended that our firefighters continue with yearly check-ups through their personal physicians. I, along with many others, continued to have the annual physical and for the next three years, all went well. But at the end of year four, a different saga began.

Just after Thanksgiving, I had my physical, along with the annual stress test. All initially appeared fine; good heart rate, good EKG, I felt good; no pain whatsoever. The attending doctor was pleased with the test and sent me on for the second set of pictures (a Thallium test). He was ready to sign off on me when the report came back indicating that several areas of the heart were not getting their proper blood supply. The heart catheterization came next with even worse news. Nearly the entire length of my Left Anterior Descending (LAD) Artery was severely blocked and several other arteries had blockages as well. As the cardiologist reviewed the results with me, he stated that I was the proverbial "ticking time bomb." Knowing that I was a firefighter, the doctor said he was very surprised that I hadn't already had a "cardiac episode" at any of my recent fire calls.

You can probably guess where I was headed next. If you said to the operating room, you are correct. There they opened me up and by-passed the severely blocked artery and two others for a "triple," as the lingo is spoken. The surgery, thankfully, was successful.

That was last December; now, fast forward to March. My cardiologist states that there was absolutely no damage to the heart and that my recovery is going fine. I'm back at work and expect to be answering fire calls very soon. Thank you, Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives. You helped save my life!

Rookies and Veterans

Captain Vincent Curry
Everyone Goes Home® Pennsylvania State Advocate

Over the years, as a fire service instructor, I have met a lot of fellow firefighters. Recently I realized the stories from rookies and veterans were the same. The rookies said "we don't fit in" and the veterans said, "rookies just don't get it." As a fire service instructor and as a company officer it is my responsibility to teach rookies and veterans on-the-job safety.

Each year we lose brothers and sisters in the line of duty - some heroic and some because of lack of training, lack of safety and lack of personal responsibility. Traditionally, rookies are janitors, cooks, dishwashers, etc. We all paid our dues. I remember when I was a rookie that I did whatever needed to be done around the station. My captains and veterans taught me to be safe and what my job was as a firefighter. It seems that we are missing those kinds of mentors within our firehouses today. Veterans, instead of pushing the younger generation aside, let's step up to the plate and teach them the job like your mentors did. The fire service is changing and to keep up with the changes we need firehouse mentors. Make sure rookies do the job safely and understand what it is to be a firefighter. Remember, these young firefighters are the future and I know I want the young firefighters at my house to be able to do the job safely and make the right choices when they are officers and veterans.

Rookies, you are the future of the fire service. You say you feel like you don't fit in because veterans push you aside. The next time the veterans at your house push you aside, challenge them to be mentors. Ask them how to use a piece of equipment or ask them what does firefighter safety mean to them. Remember, the only dumb question is the one not asked so teach them to be mentors so that they can teach you to be firefighters. I don't buy the saying that "we don't fit in." You became a firefighter for a reason and we all know it's not because of the money. This job is dangerous enough to be well-trained and safe but, it's worse when you're not trained correctly and safety is lacking. Rookies and veterans, it is your personal responsibility to learn and teach each other what it truly is to be a firefighter. The tools are there: 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives, Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives Resource Kits, and much more. Use them to teach and learn to be firefighters and mentors. Our main goal as firefighters - veterans, and rookies is to be well trained, do the right thing, make safety a priority, and most importantly, insure that Everyone Goes Home.