

16 FIREFIGHTER LIFE SAFETY INITIATIVES FOR THE WILDLAND FIREFIGHTER

- 1. Define and advocate the need for a cultural change within the fire service relating to safety; incorporating leadership, management, supervision, accountability and personal responsibility.**

The safety culture within an organization is reflected through its members' behaviors, attitudes, and actions. Initiative #1 asks us to explore the characteristics of our organizations to bring about a higher commitment to safety, and to challenge the belief that the loss of a firefighter is a normal occurrence.

- 2. Enhance the personal and organizational accountability for health and safety throughout the fire service.**

Every member of the organization must accept personal responsibility for his or her actions, as well as be "accounted for" and held accountable by the organization.

- 3. Focus greater attention on the integration of risk management with incident management at all levels, including strategic, tactical and planning responsibilities.**

To function safely in a high-risk environment, firefighters must implement risk management controls wherever they can to help reduce injuries and line-of-duty deaths.

- 4. All firefighters must be empowered to stop unsafe practices.**

Every organization should provide an environment that allows its members to speak up regarding personal and organizational safety, without negative consequences for doing so (within a prescribed context), and without decentralizing the authority of the formal leader.

- 5. Develop and implement national standards for training, qualifications, and certification (including regular recertification) that are equally applicable to all firefighters based on the duties they are expected to perform.**

The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) identifies firefighter recruits, firefighters participating in training and firefighters conducting training as especially vulnerable to death and injury. Utilizing training programs that have been designed and conducted in concert with the appropriate agency standards or policies can reduce needless deaths and injuries. If your agency does not have standards or policies in place, utilize NFPA Professional Qualifications Standards such as NFPA 1051 and 1143.

- 6. Develop and implement national medical and physical fitness standards that are equally applicable to all firefighters, based on the duties they are expected to perform.**

The most significant reductions in line-of-duty deaths are likely to be achieved through increased medical surveillance and physical fitness programs – Initiative #6 advocates to increase awareness of the need for medical and physical wellness programs for every firefighter.

- 7. Create a national research agenda and data collection system that relates to the 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives.**

The National Fire Service Research Agenda helps the many different organizations and individuals that have a role in conducting, supporting, and encouraging research projects to focus their efforts and resources on the areas that have been identified as important and significant by a group that represents the diverse interests and priorities of all aspects of the fire service—all with the overarching goal of eliminating preventable firefighter line-of-duty injuries and fatalities.

- 8. Utilize available technology wherever it can produce higher levels of health and safety.**

Where technology is concerned, the fire service is certainly gaining ground, but lags in important indicators. Internet access and basic technological equipment are second nature to many of us, and yet we forget that tens of thousands of firefighters are responding everyday lacking the tools they need to achieve basic levels of safety.

- 9. Thoroughly investigate all firefighter fatalities, injuries, and near-misses.**

Initiative #9 asks us to learn from our mistakes—the only way to do this is to thoroughly investigate every near-miss, significant injury or fatality.

- 10. Grant programs should support the implementation of safe practices and procedures and/or mandate safe practices as an eligibility requirement.**

Grant money can go far in helping organizations to implement safe practices. Reasonable efforts should be made to ensure that grants reinforce safety whenever practical.

- 11. National standards for emergency response policies and procedures should be developed and championed.**

Initiative #11 calls for a minimum set of activities that are universally recognized and understood to assure life safety at every fire—regardless of organizational composition, or geographic location. Common standards provide the added benefit of allowing multiple responding agencies to operate with similar strategic and tactical considerations, regardless of the complexity of the event.

- 12. National protocols for response to violent incidents should be developed and championed.**

Initiative #12 expands our understanding of how and where firefighters can be injured and demonstrates the need for the development of national protocols regarding violent incidents.

- 13. Firefighters and their families must have access to counseling and psychological support.**

Firefighters and their families must have the resources to deal with the various complications that their jobs can bring to their lives, especially issues regarding emotional and psychological stress.

- 14. Public education must receive more resources and be championed as a critical fire and life safety program.**

Public education is an effective means for establishing fire safe behavior among people of all ages and abilities. It also promotes understanding and acceptance of Firewise Communities, as well as regulations and technologies that can reduce the number and severity of fires and improve public and firefighter safety.

- 15. Advocacy must be strengthened for the enforcement of codes and the installation of home fire sprinklers.**

We must advocate for stronger codes and laws which will decrease the number and severity of fires and will keep our firefighters out of harm's way. Stronger codes requiring defensible space, building materials, water supplies, and proper egress are included within this initiative.

- 16. Safety must be a primary consideration in the design of apparatus and equipment.**

Today's fire service leaders, at all levels, have a vested interest and a legal responsibility to provide for the safety of firefighters. No firefighter should die in the line of duty due to apparatus or equipment-related issues.

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When you really take these initiatives to heart and you look at them as a whole meshing together it's about everybody coming home; it doesn't matter who's responsible for the dirt or the trees, who owns the land, or who runs the jurisdiction – it's to make sure everybody comes home, whether you're structure or wildland or volunteer.

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– Vicki Minor, Executive Director, Wildland Firefighter Foundation



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The 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives are like any other effort in that the return is based on the investment. If the wildland fire community can use all or portions of the 16 to drive changes in attitude, behaviors and actions it could result in the desired outcomes that the fire service as a whole is looking to achieve, the reduction of line-of-duty deaths and injuries. Use these as additional topics for safety meetings, additional topics for the 'six minute' discussions and decide as individuals, crews, modules or any unit how you can use the 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives to help meet the goals.

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– Steve Gage, Board President, Wildland Firefighter Foundation



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Everyone Goes Home® is a program of the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation.

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