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SOG HEAT ILLNESS PREVENTION PROGRAM

Heat Illness Prevention Program

PURPOSE: To promote member health and safety by establishing a heat illness prevention program for all Western Placer County fire departments to operate consistently. It aims to reduce the risk of illness or injury due to high heat working conditions and establish incident rehabilitation guidelines to maintain members' physical and mental condition, ensuring effective emergency operations (8 CCR 3395).

GUIDELINE: This procedure shall apply to **all emergency operations and training exercises** where personnel are exposed to heavy physical exertion and/or extreme heat conditions.

I. A **rehabilitation group** will be established by the Incident Commander (IC) when conditions dictate that rest and rehabilitation are needed at an emergency scene. Rehabilitation considerations should include but are not limited to the following:

   a. **Length of the operation** - The two-bottle rule should generally be observed. After the use of two self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) air bottles, or 30 to 60 minutes of strenuous activity, a firefighter should be evaluated in the rehabilitation area. Rehabilitation should generally be considered for any extended incident.
   b. **Amount of exertion** - Company officers should maintain an awareness of the exertion/exhaustion level of crews. The degree of exertion can vary greatly in each incident.
   c. **Adverse climatic conditions** - Temperatures in excess of 90 degrees have historically produced early onset of heat exhaustion and/or collapse. Rehabilitation efforts should generally be established when ambient air temperature is over 85 degrees and there is a potential for extended operations. High humidity also plays a role and should be considered.
   d. **Communication** - It may be difficult for the IC to assess the exertion or exhaustion level of the firefighters. If a firefighter needs rest, he/she is responsible for communicating his/her needs to a supervisor. If one individual is experiencing heat exhaustion, supervisors should be aware that there may be additional firefighters in need of rehabilitation.

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II. **Establishing a rehabilitation area** and rehab personnel key considerations:

a. **Select and establish a suitable location:**
   i. Choose a shaded or covered area whenever possible
   ii. Consider proximity to incident operations without interfering with tactical activities
   iii. Utilize existing structures, apparatus, or EZ-Up's for shade

b. **Ensure logistical support:**
   i. Provide an adequate supply of drinking water and electrolyte replacement fluids
   ii. Supply light snacks or food as appropriate for extended operations
   iii. Set up seating or rest areas for personnel

c. **Implement cooling measures:**
   i. Provide cooling towels, misting fans, or ice packs if available
   ii. Encourage removal of turnout gear during rehab (while maintaining modesty and safety)

d. **Conduct medical evaluations:**
   i. Monitor all personnel entering rehab for signs of heat-related illness
   ii. Report any medical emergencies immediately to the Incident Commander (IC)
   iii. Ensure a standby ambulance is available when appropriate

e. **Coordinate personnel readiness:**
   i. Maintain accountability of crews in rehab
   ii. Advise crews to communicate with the IC when they are ready for reassignment
   iii. Ensure adequate recovery time before returning members to operations

RESPONSIBLE: **Incident Commander (IC)** - It is the responsibility of the IC to make an early determination of situations that may require a rehabilitation group and institute the appropriate rehabilitation efforts accordingly.
IC considerations:

- Establish a rehab area and identify location

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- Rotate fatigued crews into rehab as conditions permit
- Confirm rehab has all the manpower, equipment and logistical supplies needed

Supervisors - It is the responsibility of every supervisor to monitor the condition of all firefighters for signs of heat stress or fatigue. When these conditions are noted, the officer shall advise the IC and request assignment of the company to the rehabilitation group.

Operations Department Personnel - It is the responsibility of all personnel operating at an incident to report to their immediate supervisors if they are feeling the strain of overexertion. There is a point at which even the most physically fit individual becomes a liability rather than an asset due to intense physical exertion in turnout clothing. Taking 10 to 20 minutes in rehabilitation to cool down and rehydrate can prevent illness and injury.

Rehab Personnel - Rehab personnel are responsible for setting up and managing the rehabilitation area during incidents or training events where heat stress is a concern. Their primary duties include providing shade, hydration, cooling, medical evaluation, and coordinating with command staff to ensure firefighter health and readiness.

DEFINITIONS:

Fireground rehabilitation - A system for on-scene management of firefighter heat stress, dehydration, and fatigue. The primary goals of rehabilitation are rehydration, rest, and cooling; assessment of remaining work capacity; and recognition and treatment of heat strain injuries.

Heat exhaustion - A condition caused by the loss of large amounts of fluid by sweating. A worker suffering from heat exhaustion still sweats but experiences extreme weakness or fatigue, giddiness, nausea, or headache. In more serious cases, the victim may vomit or lose consciousness. Skin may be clammy or moist, pale, or flushed. Body temperature is normal to slightly elevated. Mild heat exhaustion will respond to copious water and a cool environment. Those with severe cases may require extended care for several days.

Heat stress - The aggregate of environmental and physical work factors that constitute the total heat load imposed on the body. Heat load is derived from two major sources:

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- Internally generated metabolic heat, which is a by-product of chemical processes that occur within the cells, tissue, and organs of firefighters exerting themselves in turnout clothing
- Externally imposed environmental heat, which influences the rate at which body heat can be exchanged with the environment and consequently the ease with which the body can regulate and maintain a normal temperature

Heat strain - The series of physiological responses to heat stress. These responses reflect the degree of heat stress. When the strain is excessive for the individual, a heat disorder (heat exhaustion or heat stroke) will follow.

Heat stroke - A condition where the body's temperature regulatory system fails, sweating becomes inadequate, and the body's only effective means of removing excess heat is compromised. Early recognition and treatment of heat stroke is the only means of preventing permanent brain damage or death. Signs and symptoms of heat stroke may include mental confusion, convulsions, an altered level of consciousness, and skin that is hot, usually dry, red, spotted, or temperature is usually 104 or higher.

REFERENCES:
Lexipol
California Code of Regulations, Title 8, Section 3395, Heat Illness Prevention Standard

REVISION/REVIEW HISTORY:
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WESTERN PLACER COUNTY FIRE CHIEFS ASSOCIATION

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