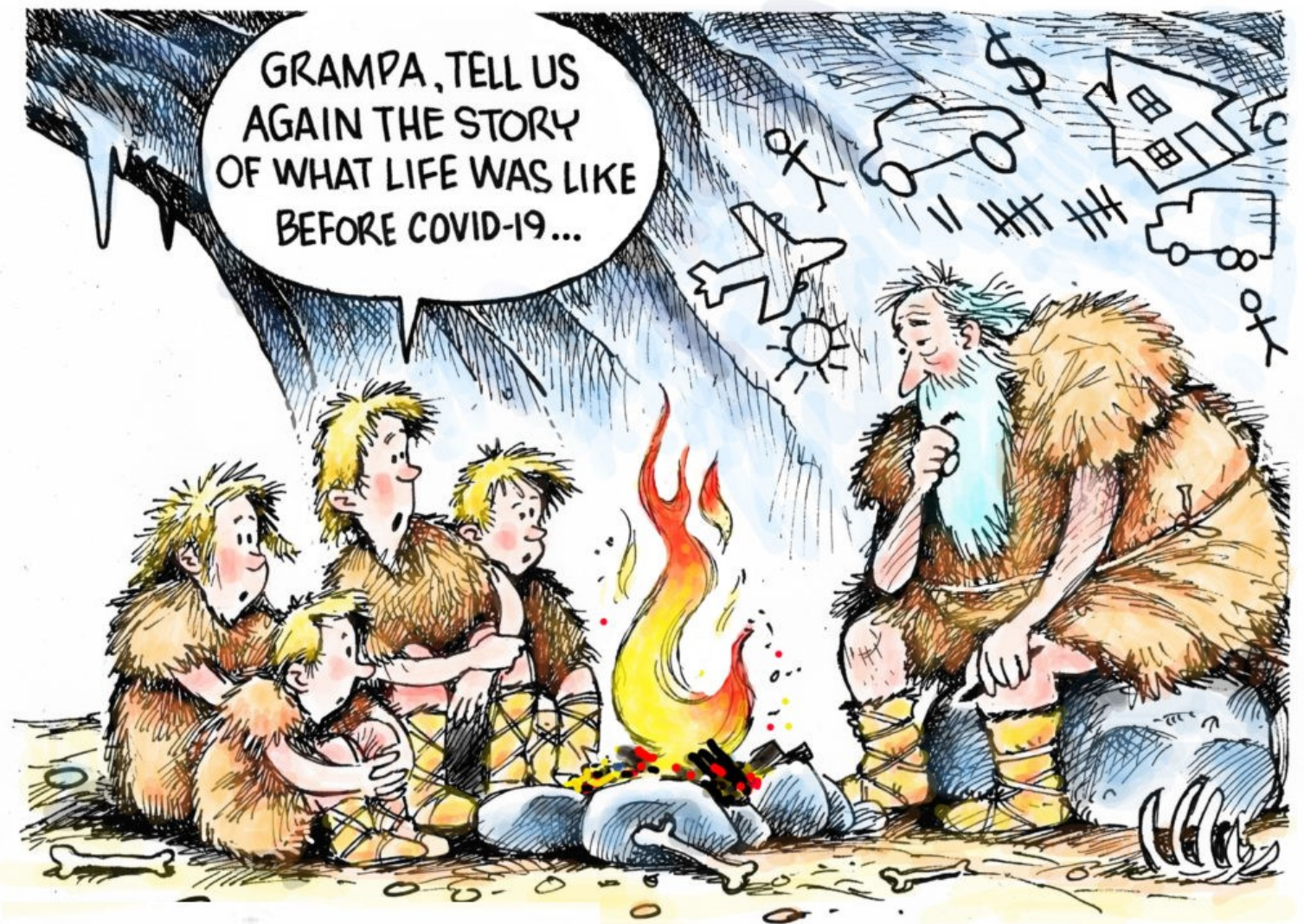


IFA Voice

Spring 2021



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District Chief Tim Krack was presented with a retirement axe on his retirement from the Evansville Fire Department. The members of station made the presentation.



It has been brought to my attention that there is a group that is making calls and pretending to be the Indiana Firefighters Association requesting a donation. Remember That The Indiana Firefighters Association ***Does not make calls for a DONATION***

Firefighters Battle an Unseen Hazard: Their Gear Could Be Toxic

This week, in a first, firefighters are demanding independent testing for cancer-linked chemicals known as PFAS in their gear and that their union drop sponsorships from chemical and equipment makers.

Every day at work for 15 years, Sean Mitchell, a captain in the Nantucket Fire Department, has put on the bulky suit that protects him from the heat and flames he faces on the job. But last year, he and his team came across unsettling research: Toxic chemicals on the very equipment meant to protect their lives could instead be making them gravely ill.



This week, Captain Mitchell and other members of the International Association of Fire Fighters, the nation's largest firefighters' union, are demanding that union officials take action. They want independent tests of PFAS, the chemicals in their gear, and for the union to rid itself of sponsorships from equipment makers and the chemical industry. In the next few days, delegates representing the union's more than 300,000 members are expected to vote on the measure — a first.

"We're exposed to these chemicals every day," Captain Mitchell said. "And the more I looked into it, the more it felt like the only people who were saying these chemicals were safe were the people who make it."

The demands come as the safety of firefighters has become an urgent concern amid the worsening effects of climate change, which bring rising temperatures that prime the nation for increasingly devastating fires. In October, two dozen firefighters in California — where [a record 4.2 million acres](#) burned across the state last year — filed suit against 3M, Chemours, E.I. du Pont de Nemours and other manufacturers, claiming that the companies for decades knowingly made and sold firefighting equipment loaded with toxic chemicals without warning of the chemicals' risks.

"Firefighting is a dangerous occupation, and we don't want our firefighters to burn up. They need that protection," said Linda Birnbaum, the former director of the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences. "But we now know that PFAS is in their gear, and it doesn't stay in their gear."

"A lot of it migrates out and gets into the air that they're breathing, and it's on their hands, and their bodies," Dr. Birnbaum added. "If they take their gear home to wash, they're bringing PFAS back to their families."

DuPont said it was "disappointed" with firefighters seeking to ban sponsorships and that its commitment to the profession was "unwavering." 3M said it had "acted responsibly" on PFAS and remained committed to working with the union. Chemours declined to comment.

The risks of chemicals in firefighting equipment may seem to pale in comparison to the deadly flames, smoke-filled buildings or forest infernos that firefighters brave on the job. But over the past three decades, cancer has emerged as [the leading cause of death](#) for firefighters across the country, making up 75 percent of active-duty firefighter deaths in 2019.

[Studies undertaken by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health](#) have found that firefighters have a 9 percent higher risk of getting cancer and a 14 percent higher risk of dying from the disease than the general United States population. Firefighters are most at risk for testicular cancer, mesothelioma and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, and rates haven't declined, health experts point out, even though firefighters in the United States now use air packs similar to scuba gear to protect themselves from a fire's toxic fumes.

TOXIC GEAR ???

“It’s not the traditional line-of-duty death, the firefighter falling through the floor, or the roof collapsing on us,” said Jim Burneka, a firefighter in Dayton, Ohio, who also runs Firefighter Cancer Consultants, which works with fire departments across the country to reduce cancer risks to their staffs. “It’s a new kind of line-of-duty death. It’s still the job that kills us. It’s just we die with our boots off.”

Though it is difficult to establish direct links between exposure to chemicals and cancer, particularly in individual cases, health experts have warned that exposure to chemicals is increasing firefighters’ cancer risks. One culprit: the foams that firefighters use to fight particularly hazardous blazes. Some states have moved to ban their use.

But [a study published last year](#) by researchers at the University of Notre Dame found significant quantities of similar chemicals in firefighters’ protective clothing, applied to keep the clothes water-resistant. The researchers found that those chemicals were shedding from the clothing or in some cases migrating into the coat’s inner layers.

The chemicals in question belong to a class of synthetic compounds, called [per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS](#), found in a range of products including fast-food containers and furniture. Sometimes called “forever chemicals” because they don’t fully degrade in the environment, PFAS have been linked to [a host of health effects](#), including cancer, liver damage, decreased fertility, asthma and thyroid disease.

And while some forms of PFAS are being phased out, the replacements have not been proven to be safer, said Graham F. Peaslee, a professor in experimental nuclear physics, chemistry and biochemistry at Notre Dame who led the study.

“It’s one more risk factor, but it’s one that we can eliminate, whereas you can’t eliminate the risk of running into a burning building,” Dr. Peaslee said. “And firefighters aren’t told about this. So they’re wearing it, they’re lounging in it when they’re between calls,” he said. “That’s chronic exposure, and that’s not good.”

Doug W. Stern, a media relations executive with the International Association of Fire Fighters, said that it has been policy and practice for years that members wear fire gear only for fires or emergency calls.

The Biden administration has said it would make PFAS a priority. In campaign documents, President Biden pledged to designate PFAS as a hazardous substance to make manufacturers and other polluters pay for cleanup, and set a national drinking water standard for the chemical. New York, Maine and Washington have moved to ban PFAS from food packaging, and other bans are in the works.

“There’s a need to drive PFAS out of everyday products, like food and cosmetics, textiles, carpets,” said Scott Faber, senior vice president for government affairs for the Environmental Working Group, a nonprofit group that works on environmental health. “Firefighters are disproportionately exposed, on top of all that.”

Lt. Ron Glass, president of the Orlando Professional Firefighters union, who has been a firefighter for a quarter-century, has lost two of his peers to cancer in the past year. “When I first got hired, the leading cause of death was a line-of-duty fire accident, then it was heart attacks,” he said. “Now it’s all cancers.”

TOXIC GEAR???

“Initially, everybody blamed the different materials burning, or the foam. Then we started digging a little deeper into it and started looking at our bunker gear,” he said. “The manufacturers initially told us there’s nothing wrong, there’s nothing harmful at all. But it turns out there’s PFAS not only on the outer shell, but in the interior lining, which goes against our skin.”

Lieutenant Glass and his colleagues are now pressing the International Association of Fire Fighters, which represents firefighters and paramedics in the United States as well as Canada, to run further tests. Their formal resolution, submitted this week to the union’s annual convention, also asks the union to work with manufacturers to develop safer alternatives.

Captain Mitchell, meanwhile, is pressing the union to refuse future sponsorships from chemicals and equipment manufacturers, money he feels has slowed action on the issue. In 2018, the union received about \$200,000 from companies including the fabrics manufacturer W.L. Gore and equipment maker MSA Safety, records show.

Mr. Stern pointed out that the union supports research into PFAS exposure science as it relates to fire gear and is working with researchers on three major studies, one on PFAS in firefighters’ blood, one studying dust in fire stations to determine PFAS levels, and a third on testing fire-fighting gear for PFAS. The union also supports other researchers as they apply for grants to study PFAS issues, he said.

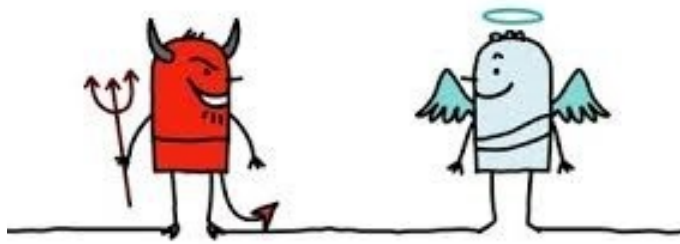
W.L. Gore said it remained confident in the safety of its products. MSA Safety did not respond to a request for comment.

Another obstacle is that manufacturers hold prominent positions at the body that oversees standards for firefighting gear, the National Fire Protection Association. Half the members of a committee that oversees protective-clothing and equipment standards, for example, [are from industry](#). A spokeswoman for the group said the committees represented a “balanced variety of interests, including the fire service.”

Diane Cotter — whose husband, Paul, a firefighter in Worcester, Mass., was told seven years ago that he had cancer — was among the first to raise the concerns over PFAS in the gear. Her husband had just been promoted to lieutenant in September 2014, after 27 years of service. “But in October, his career was over,” Ms. Cotter said. “He had his cancer diagnosis. And I can’t tell you how shocking that was.”



She had heard that European fire-fighters were moving away from PFAS use, but when she started writing manufacturers in the United States, she “couldn’t get any answers,” she said. Action by the union is important, she said, though it would be too late for her husband. “The hardest thing is that he can’t return to work,” Ms. Cotter said.



Three men, a philosopher, a mathematician and an idiot, were out riding in the car when it crashed into a tree. Before anyone knows it, the three men found themselves standing before the Pearly Gates of Heaven, with St. Peter and the Devil standing nearby.

“Gentlemen,” the Devil started, “Due to the fact that Heaven is now overcrowded, St. Peter has agreed to limit the number of people entering Heaven. If anyone of you can ask me a question which I don’t know or cannot answer, then you’re worthy enough to go to Heaven; if not, then you’ll come with me to Hell.”

The philosopher then stepped up, “OK, give me the most comprehensive report on Socrates’ teachings.” With a snap of his finger, a stack of paper appeared next to the Devil. The philosopher read it and concluded it was correct. “Then, down you go” With another snap of his finger, the philosopher disappeared.

The mathematician then asked, “Give me the most complicated formula ever theorized!” With a snap of his finger, another stack of paper appeared next to the Devil. The mathematician read it and reluctantly agreed it was correct. “Then, down you go” With another snap of his finger, the mathematician disappeared too.

The idiot then stepped forward and said, “Bring me a chair!” The Devil brought forward a chair. “Drill 7 holes on the seat.” The Devil did just that. The idiot then sat on the chair and let out a very loud fart. Standing up, he asked, “Which hole did my fart come out from?” The Devil inspected the seat and said, “The third hole from the right.” “Wrong,” said the idiot, “from my butt hole.” And the idiot went to Heaven.





So You Want To Be A Firefighter

Becoming a firefighter is no easy task. It requires hard work, long hours of training, dedication and a sincere desire to help others.

The firefighting career field is very competitive, too. You'll be up against hundreds, possibly thousands of applicants depending on how large the department. How will you stand out and where do you start?

1. MEET BASIC REQUIREMENTS TO BECOME A FIREFIGHTER

In order to become a firefighter, you will need a valid driver's license and meet the age requirement of 18 years old. For those younger than 18, you can look into limited involvement as a junior firefighter. There also will likely be a maximum age, usually between 28 and 35 years old, depending on the department you're applying to.

2. MEET (AND EXCEED) EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

At the very minimum, you'll need to obtain a high school diploma or GED. Many firefighters earn a degree in fire science to advance their career. It's also wise to become an EMT. Having both a fire and EMS background will improve your odds of being hired. Some departments might even require an EMT certification; larger departments may require a paramedic's license.

3. GET IN GOOD PHYSICAL CONDITION

Becoming a firefighter requires passing a physical ability test. The CPAT events are stair climb, hose drag, equipment carry, ladder raise and extension, forcible entry, search, rescue, ceiling breach and pull. Prepare yourself for the physical nature of the job as well as the demands of the test.

4. STAY OUT OF TROUBLE

At one point in your life, you've probably done something you're not proud of. How you've acted to rectify your mistakes will be important when applying to become a firefighter. FireRescue1 columnist Mike Pertz, who founded a website aimed at helping others become firefighters, **recently wrote an article** on this very subject.

If you are asked about your past record during an interview, do not lie. Instead, take ownership for your mistakes. Explain to the hiring panel how you've changed and what you've done to change. Also, be up front about your driving record – include dates, locations and outcomes of tickets and accidents.

5. KEEP YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA NOSE CLEAN

If you use Facebook or other social media platforms, **be mindful of what you post**, repost, comment on and like. Expect all potential employers to scan your social media presence. If there's embarrassing, immature, risqué or otherwise inappropriate posts on your pages, remove them. Ask your friends to remove any such posts involving you from their pages. In some cases, it makes sense to close out your accounts.



6. PROVE YOUR FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

This is often overlooked, but the required background check **covers credit score**. Bad credit will hurt you. Be disciplined about improving your score if need be.

7. GET INVOLVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Working in public safety is all about community service. Volunteering your time for a great cause is one way to prove you're ready to serve your community. And it doesn't matter if it's fire-related or non-fire related. There's a lot of great opportunities out there for you to make a difference. The **American Red Cross** or **Habitat for Humanity** are two excellent options.

8. PASS THE WRITTEN EXAM

Study, study, study. And, when in doubt, study some more. The written exam consists of multiple-choice questions and is divided into categories. Check out **these test-taking basics** to give yourself the best chance at passing with flying colors.

9. PREPARE FOR A PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION

You can't study for this one. This evaluation will look at your mental and emotional stability to withstand the stresses associated with firefighting.

10. GRADUATE A FIRE ACADEMY

Getting your state entry-level firefighter certifications, such as Firefighter I and II, is a great move. You'll still need to attend a department's academy once hired, but this gives you a leg up and helps you learn the book and practical skills of the job. Joining a volunteer fire department is one way to get into an academy.

HUMANA INSURANCE

The Insurance Program that the Indiana Firefighters started with Humana is still available to retirees that want an alternative to the Insurance plan that they now have.

If you would like more information contact

Judy Hagewood 502-424-4051

Membership 866-396-8810

The plan is on line at indfa.com to see cost and benefits



Are Seat Belts Really Necessary ???

Four years ago, a story was published saying that there was hope that 2017 would be the first year that no firefighter died as a result of injuries from not being seat-belted when operating or riding in a moving vehicle.

Unfortunately, that goal was not met in 2017. Or in 2018. Or 2019. Or 2020.

Firefighters continue to die as a result of failing to use seat belts, the most avoidable of all line-of-duty-death (LODD) causes. Why is this still happening?



There has been a significant cultural shift over the past 50 years when it comes to seat belts. I am old enough to remember when they were merely a suggestion, and some vehicles were not even equipped with them. In the days of open cabs and firefighters riding the tailboard, seat belts often conflicted with practical operations.

But those days are long gone. Now most personal vehicles are relentless in reminding occupants to use seat belts. State laws require their use. Parents wouldn't dream of letting their kids ride unrestrained. And the evidence that seat belts save lives is overwhelming and unequivocal. Nobody knows this better than firefighters and other first responders who respond to sometimes horrific motor vehicle crashes. Yet there are still some who drive to the fire station while safely belted in their own private vehicles, and then jump on the rig without giving the use of seat belts a second thought.

Increasing the use of seat belts by firefighters was first promoted on a national scale in 2005 by [Dr. Burton Clark](#), a program director at the National Fire Academy and a longtime volunteer with his hometown fire department in Maryland. That year, he wrote an article about the death of Amarillo, Texas, Firefighter Brian Hunton, who was killed

when he fell from a rig during an emergency response. Clark provocatively began that article by stating, “If you are the fire chief and you know that you do not have a 100% compliance 100% of the time with your seat belt policy, you killed Firefighter Brian Hunton.” At that point, he made a personal commitment to improving firefighter safety culture by promoting seat belt use.

Clark subsequently created the National Seatbelt Pledge, which gives firefighters the opportunity to make a personal commitment to seat belt use and recognizes departments that promote this behavior. He managed the pledge in the early years but responsibility for it was [transferred to the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation \(NFFF\)](#) in 2010 and directed through their Everyone Goes Home initiative. After some flagging interest in the pledge in recent years, it was relaunched in January 2019 after undergoing upgrades based on user input.

John Tippet, director of Fire Programs for NFFF, pointed out that while the seat belt pledge may not have the same effect for everyone, it still creates an overall benefit: “If you’re a person that believes in your word and your commitment, then signing the seat belt pledge is a reinforcement of that. If you’re a person who’s just doing it to get the chief off your back, it’s probably not going to change your mind. But it could be an element that creates an accountability factor. You are going to be held to your word.”

One problem with ensuring universal seat belt use is the lack of complete data about the issue. LODD reports involving moving vehicles do not always indicate whether seat belts were worn at the time of the incident. [Research has shown](#) that firefighters might be inconsistent in their use of seat belts, making their use conditional rather than absolute.

There is little data about other factors that might influence seat belt use, such as rank, seniority or generational differences. Many organizations have unclear accountability for ensuring seat belts are used whenever the rig is moving. Is the driver responsible? The company officer? Is it time to look at more technical solutions, such as upgrading seat belt alarms or even creating technology where fire or emergency apparatus cannot move until all occupied seats have seat belts engaged?

But technical solutions can only go so far. Every firefighter knows that seat belts save lives; they see this reality on a daily basis. Their reluctance to be in 100% compliance with seat belt use may be a result of good intentions. “Wasting time putting on your gear when arriving at a structure fire may cost someone their life!” was one comment from research.



The dinner I was cooking for my family was going to be a surprise but the fire trucks ruined it.



Indiana Town Alters Call Firefighter Pay Over FLSA and Fairness Concerns

The Town Council in Dyer, Indiana recently passed a temporary ordinance related to compensating town employees that also serve as paid-on-call firefighters. The ordinance, which was unanimously passed by the council, mandates the town set the overtime rate for town employees that also serve as paid-on-call firefighters, at time and one-half of the “highest regular hourly rate of pay” earned by the employee during that workweek. The new temporary ordinance stems from both FLSA concerns and an apparent inequity between pay rates received by call firefighters.

The FLSA allows an employer to pay an employee two different rates of pay for working two different jobs within the same work week. For example, an employee could earn \$25 per hour working in a city’s public works department and only \$15 per hour working as a paid-on-call or part-time EMT for the same city. However, as a general rule, the FLSA requires that the hours worked in both capacities be combined in order to determine overtime eligibility for that employee for that workweek.

If the employee works more than 40 hours in that workweek (between both positions), the employee is most likely entitled to FLSA overtime. This requirement is fairly straight-forward and easy to understand. However, the real challenge often arises when trying to determine that employee’s overtime rate for that workweek. Is it time and one-half of \$25 or \$15 per hour? Or is it something entirely different? This is the challenge Dyer city officials are facing. In response the city passed the temporary ordinance while searching for a long-term solution that will meet FLSA requirements while maintaining fairness and equity among the city’s call firefighters. Department of Labor (DOL) regulations prescribe two methods of calculating the regular rate for employees receiving two different pay rates in the same workweek. The most common method, often referred to as a “blended rate” can be found at 29 CFR 778.115. This method allows the employer to calculate the weighted average of pay rates earned during each work-week and base the employee’s overtime rate off of that average. The second, and less popular method, which can be found at 29 CFR 778.115 allows the employer to pay the employee’s overtime rate based upon the rate of pay for the work that he or she is performing during the overtime hours. This second method also requires an agreement between both the employer and employee to utilize. Needless to say, the Town of Dyer was wise to recognize this potential issue and look to address it with a long-term solution that will hopefully prove more equitable for employees while maintaining FLSA compliance.

Just as a note. This article cites extensively the city’s current hourly compensation practices for “volunteer firefighters.” However, according to the city’s website the fire department is staffed by paid-on-call firefighters. Readers familiar with both the FLSA and volunteer firefighters will likely recognize significant wage and hour issues associated with compensating volunteer firefighters and more specifically compensating volunteer firefighters by the hour. It is most likely safe to assume, the Town of Dyer utilizes paid-on-call and not volunteer firefighters.

Firefighters, Mandatory COVID-19 Testing and the FLSA

FLSA Question: *We require mandatory weekly COVID tests for all of our firefighters. We pay off-duty firefighters four hours of overtime to come into the station every week to get tested. First, do we need to pay them four hours for what is really only a twenty-minute activity? Second, since it is related to public health, do we even have to pay them at all for this?*

Answer: Very good question. I think that you would be surprised to realize how many wage and hour issues a seemingly straight-forward question like this one presents. Let's break it down piece-by-piece.

First, the FLSA does not require paying an employee for any hours not actually worked. The FLSA simply requires that non-exempt [i.e., overtime eligible] employees be paid for all the time they are *suffered or permitted to work*. If an employee is working for twenty minutes, there is no FLSA requirement to pay that employee for more than twenty minutes. There could be a collective bargaining provision or even a state law that requires an employee receive a guaranteed minimum number of paid hours when that employee is called back into work, however there is no such requirement from the FLSA.

Similarly, the FLSA does not automatically require an employee receive overtime pay for returning to work after normally scheduled work hours. The FLSA requires non-exempt employees receive overtime for ***all hours worked over the maximum hours*** for each workweek or work period. There is no *per se* FLSA requirement for overtime pay for participating in the test after normal work hours. A collective bargaining agreement and/or city policy could mandate overtime pay for employees that work additional hours above and beyond their normal work schedule, however that is also not a requirement of the FLSA.

In order to even begin to answer the second half of your question, I need to make two basic assumptions. First, the firefighters that you reference are eligible to work. In other words, they are not out of work on a work-related disability or illness. Workers' compensation law and other local laws would likely control that analysis. Second, these firefighters are not high-ranking officers that are overtime exempt. For example, staff chiefs or top-level administrators would likely not be eligible for FLSA overtime regardless of whether the time spent for a mandatory COVID test is actually compensable.

Ok, is the time spent by *off-duty* firefighters participating in mandatory COVID testing compensable? Unfortunately, neither the FLSA nor Department of Labor (DOL) regulations ***directly*** address whether off-duty compulsory medical testing must be compensated. However, as a general rule most courts and the DOL have viewed time spent by employees—*at the direction and control of their employer*—participating in mandatory medical examinations as compensable hours worked. Similarly, most courts have found that time spent by employees submitting to mandatory drug testing is also compensable work time.

Developing firefighter tracking technology

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) has partnered with NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (NASA JPL) to develop firefighter tracking technology.

The effort would allow first responders to locate team members in burning buildings more accurately. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, domestically, approximately 80 to 100 firefighters are lost in the line of duty each year.

Last month, S&T and NASA JPL successfully tested the Precision Outdoor and Indoor Navigation and Training for Emergency Responders (POINTER) technology at the Veteran's Affairs Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System.

Multiple POINTER devices were evaluated with members of S&T's First Responder Resource Group and industry partner Balboa Geolocation Inc. to ensure they met first responder requirements. "There are currently no commercialized tracking devices like POINTER on the market," S&T First Responder Portfolio Director Greg Price said. "This device goes far beyond GPS capabilities to give first responder teams more accurate guidance in locating their colleagues in emergency scenarios." The tests were conducted as a first step before operational field testing, utilizing several fire response agencies nationwide throughout 2021 while focusing on POINTER's tracking, visualization, and data collection capabilities component.

"Responders have told us that tracking technology is their number one priority," Price said. "This never-seen-before POINTER technology will soon change the way firefighters experience and overcome the challenges they face."



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