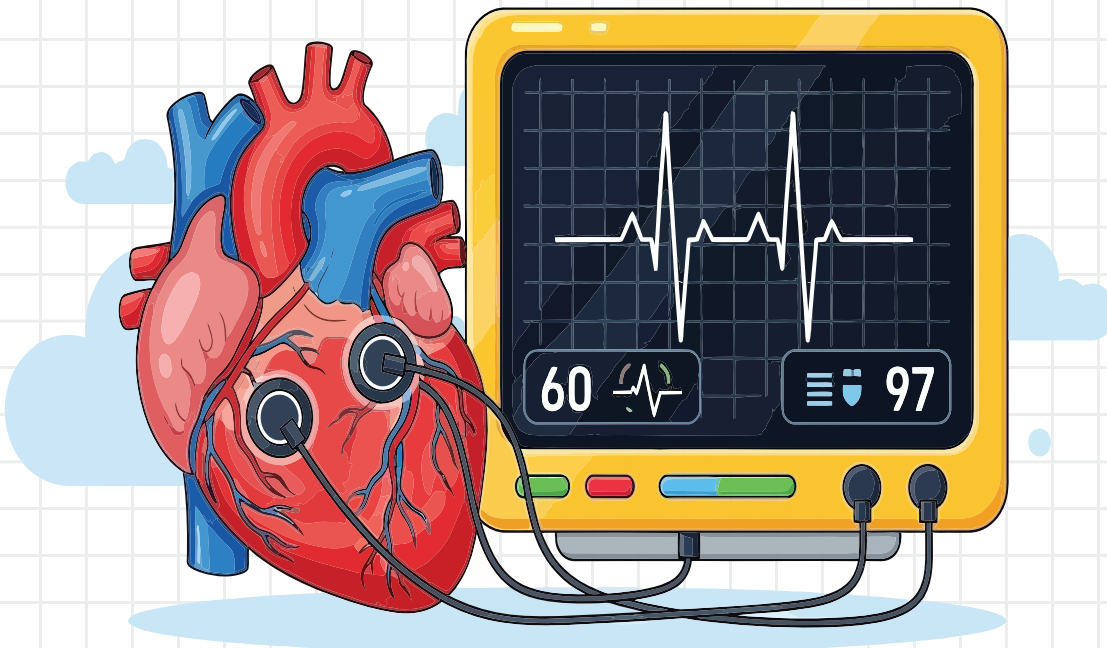


Firefighter FITNESS: Fit to Serve, Fit for Life

2026 FIREFIGHTER
SAFETY
STAND DOWN



FOUNDATIONS CARDIAC WELLNESS

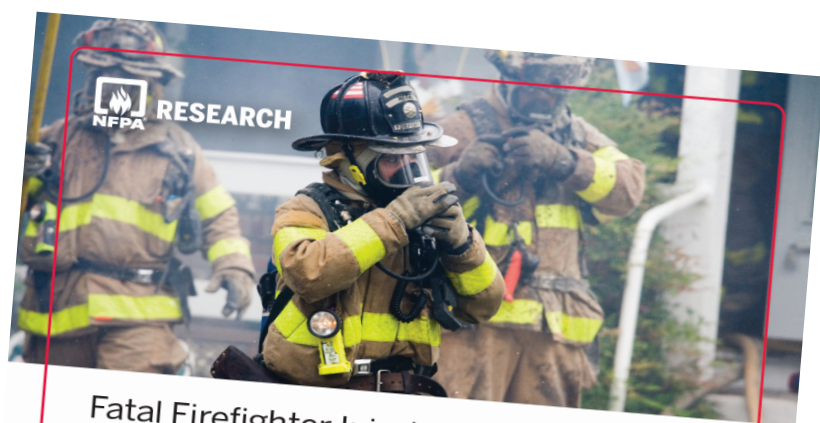


RISKS TO FIREFIGHTER HEALTH & SAFETY

Sudden cardiac death—the leading cause of firefighter fatalities during job-related activities—remains a persistent, serious concern among the fire service. Several reports highlight the factors that contribute to these fatalities, including overexertion, strain, and underlying medical conditions.

Firefighter Cardiac Fatalities

- 39% of all on-duty firefighter deaths were sudden cardiac events.
- 30 fatalities were due to heart attacks, accounting for nearly half of total firefighter fatalities.
- 10 fatalities occurred between ages 45–49 (career and volunteer combined).
- Older firefighters (60+) saw increased risks, particularly for volunteer personnel.



Fatal Firefighter Injuries in the US in 2024

Richard Campbell and Jay Petrillo
June 2025

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The annual NFPA report, “Fatal Firefighter Injuries in the US in 2024,” provides additional details about cardiac-related deaths among firefighters, along with other leading causes of firefighter fatalities that occur either on-duty or within 24 hours of duty.

In addition, the U.S. Needs Assessment report (published by NFPA every five years) aims to identify the major needs of the U.S. fire departments, showing where health and safety services are being delivered and where additional programs, training, and resources are still needed.

KEY AREAS FOR INVESTMENT

When fire departments invest in firefighter health and safety, the positive impacts can be significant. Following are common areas of needed improvement and action steps for proactively addressing them.

KEY AREAS



Fitness and Health Programs

The majority of fire departments (72 percent) do not have programs to maintain basic firefighter fitness and health.



ACTION STEPS

Enhance physical fitness programs to affirm readiness for strenuous firefighting tasks while reducing cardiac strain.



Medical/Physical Exams

Most departments (61 percent) do not provide physical and medical evaluations for all firefighters that are compliant with NFPA 1580.



Review Chapters 14-19 and Annexes H and I in NFPA 1580, *Standard for Emergency Responder Occupational Health and Wellness*, 2025 edition, for additional guidance.



Medical Program for Fire Departments

Larger departments are more likely to have a program in place that provides firefighter evaluations, but an unmet need remains across departments of all sizes. Twenty-two percent of departments only provide evaluations for new firefighters.



Strengthen prevention training to recognize signs of overexertion and monitor factors like heat exposure and dehydration. Review Sections 13.2 and 13.3 in NFPA 1550, *Standard for Emergency Responder Health and Safety*, 2024 edition, for additional guidance.



Fitness Assessments

Among departments that provide medical and physical evaluations, 43 percent do not include a fitness assessment for all firefighters.



Refine annual medical evaluations to ensure fitness assessments are tailored to high-stress occupational activities.

Learn More

- ▶ **Read** the 2025 NFPA report, "[Fatal Firefighter Injuries in the US in 2024](#)" and the 2020 NFPA report, "[A Fifth Needs Assessment of the U.S. Fire Service](#)."
- ▶ **Visit** [nfpa.org](https://www.nfpa.org) for free access to NFPA standards.
- ▶ **Explore** the digital version of the standard and have access to all other NFPA codes and standards plus expert enhanced content including checklists, videos, fact sheets, and more on the digital platform, NFPA LiNK®, at [nfpa.org/LiNK](https://www.nfpa.org/LiNK).
- ▶ **Discover** more about the hazards of worker fatigue and safety at the OSHA website: [osha.gov/worker-fatigue/hazards](https://www.osha.gov/worker-fatigue/hazards).
- ▶ **Visit** the 2026 National Firefighter Safety Stand Down website: [safetystanddown.org](https://www.safetystanddown.org).

— DID YOU KNOW? —

Slightly more than half (52 percent) of all departments do not provide individual exposure tracking, whether it is department-based or a mechanism for individuals. Exposure tracking at the department level is much more common among large departments than smaller ones.

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