



WFI
WELLNESS-FITNESS
INITIATIVE

IAFF/IAFC Wellness-Fitness Initiative

IGNITING CHANGE

Diving into the WFI Pillars



28 YEARS OF

WFI Implementation

The WFI has been one of the most comprehensive resources created to support fire fighter wellness and fitness

Aimed to highlight the interdisciplinary nature of wellness, establish the importance of collaboration between labor and management, remove any punitive associations with physical fitness, and expand the focus from fitness and performance outcomes to include behavioral change



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But, the job has changed...

Fire fighters operate in environments that are often more complex, demanding, and unpredictable than in the past. Call volumes have increased, medical responses now dominate many departments' workloads, and exposure profiles have shifted.



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And we know more about wellness and fitness...

There are known links between occupational exposures, chronic disease, injury, fatigue, mental health, and quality of life. We also know more about the behaviors (e.g. sleep, exercise) and organizational conditions (e.g. culture) that influence these outcomes.



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Still, many programs struggle...

Behavior change is often assumed, not intentionally supported, and education and assessment activities alone don't lead to lasting change. Fire fighters' ability to adopt and maintain healthy behaviors is strongly influenced by operational realities, and thus integrated approaches are needed.



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And implementation remains a critical challenge

Many programs falter because they are difficult to operationalize, poorly integrated with existing practices, or insufficiently adapted to local conditions. Outcomes are not driven by a single policy, process, or initiative – they emerge from the collective effects of multiple activities.



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Igniting Change

With the next Edition of the WFI



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The WFI is a comprehensive resource to support the implementation of wellness and fitness programs for fire fighters

Repository of Evidence

that describes the outcomes, behaviors, tactics, strategies, policies, etc. (best practice guidelines) that should be adopted to influence change

Best-Practice Guidelines

minimum recommendations, and case examples to inform the design and implementation of wellness-fitness programs for fire departments and individuals

Roadmap for Implementation

with detailed, actional steps and resources to help departments design and implement a program that aligns with best practices guidelines



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WFI 'Igniting Change' Framework

A. Defining Wellness

Establish the outcomes that matters most

B. Pursuing Wellness

Reinforce behaviors that lead to better outcomes

C. Supporting Wellness

Build operational systems that make healthy choices possible

D. Restoring Wellness

Facilitate recovery, resilience, and reintegration

E. Promoting Wellness

Prioritize planning and program implementation



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DEFINING WELLNESS

Establish the Outcomes that Matter Most



HEALTH is dynamic and multidimensional.

OUTCOMES

Cancer	Resilience
Cardiovascular Disease	Hearing Loss
Type 2 Diabetes	Cognitive Function
Obesity	Respiratory Function
Metabolic Syndrome	Immune Function
Musculoskeletal Injuries	Reproductive Health
Anxiety	Relationships
Depression	Quality of Life
Burnout	Longevity

FITNESS is dynamic and multidimensional.

OUTCOMES

Cardiorespiratory Health	Occupational Recovery
Metabolic Health	Occupational Performance
Musculoskeletal Health	Occupational Longevity
Musculoskeletal Injuries	Occupational Health and Safety
Physical Resilience	Longevity
Fatigue Resistance	Quality of Life



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PURSUING WELLNESS

Reinforce Behaviors that Lead to Better Outcomes



Mindfulness and
Self-Regulation (**BREATHE**)



Dietary Habits
and Nutrition (**EAT**)



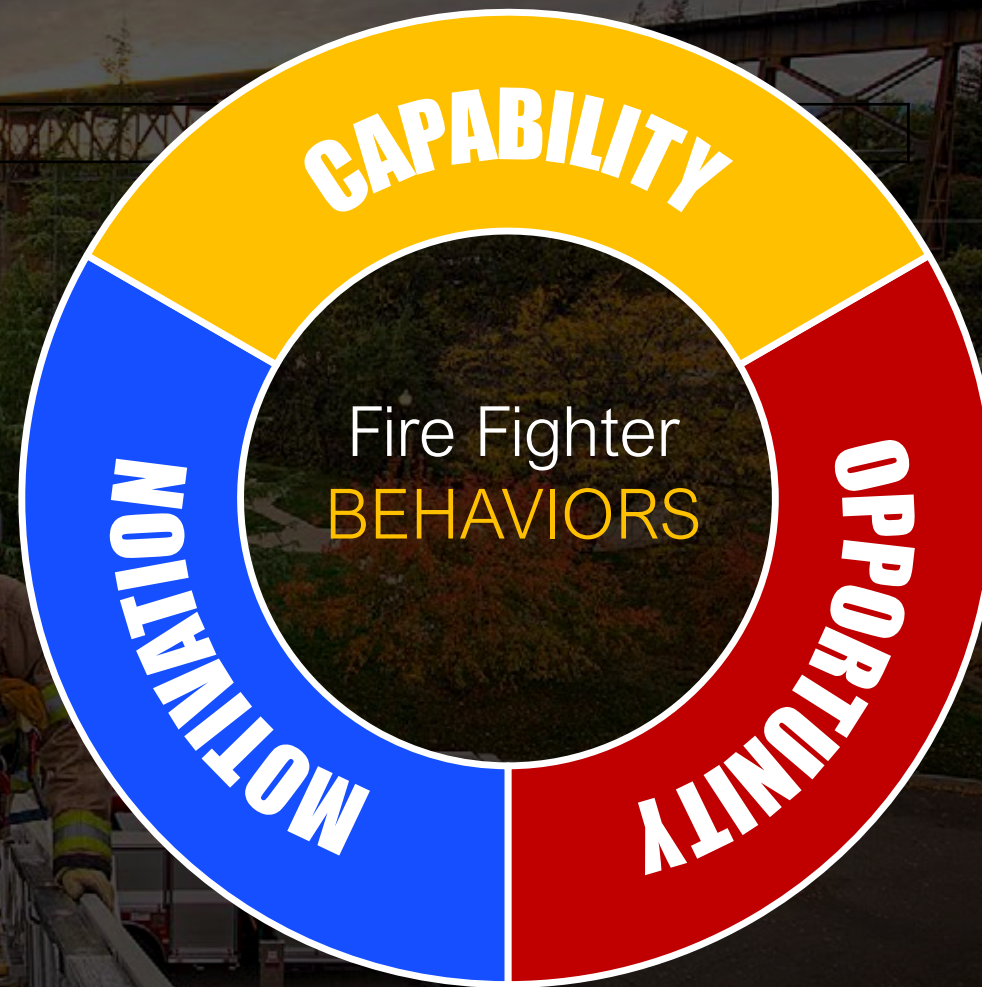
Physical Activity
and Exercise (**MOVE**).



Sleep and
Recovery (**SLEEP**).



Social Connection
and Support (**CONNECT**)



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Social Connection
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HEALTH & FITNESS OUTCOMES

Anxiety

Depression

Burnout

Resilience

Physical Resilience

Cognitive Function

Fatigue Resistance

Occupational Recovery

Occupational Performance

Quality of Life



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Sleep and
Recovery (**SLEEP**)



Social Connection
and Support (**CONNECT**)

HEALTH & FITNESS OUTCOMES

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Cancer | Reproductive Health |
| Cardiovascular Disease | Cardiorespiratory Health |
| Type 2 Diabetes | Musculoskeletal Health |
| Obesity | Fatigue Resistance |
| Metabolic Syndrome | Occupational Recovery |
| Musculoskeletal Injuries | Metabolic Health |
| Cognitive Function | Occupational Performance |
| Immune Function | Longevity |



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HEALTH & FITNESS OUTCOMES

Cancer

Resilience

Cardiovascular Disease

Cardiorespiratory Health

Type 2 Diabetes

Metabolic Health

Obesity

Musculoskeletal Health

Metabolic Syndrome

Physical Resilience

Musculoskeletal Injuries

Fatigue Resistance

Cognitive Function

Occupational Recovery

Respiratory Function

Occupational Performance

Immune Function

Occupational Longevity

Reproductive Health

Occupational Health & Safety

Anxiety

Longevity

Depression

Quality of Life

Burnout



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HEALTH & FITNESS OUTCOMES

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------------|
| Anxiety | Fatigue Resistance |
| Depression | Occupational Longevity |
| Burnout | Occupational Health & Safety |
| Resilience | Longevity |
| Relationships | Quality of Life |
| Physical Resilience | |



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SUPPORTING WELLNESS

Build Operational Systems that Make Healthy Choices Possible



Exposure Control
and Decontamination



Environmental Restructuring
and Ergonomics



Fatigue Management
and Occupational Resilience



Health and Safety
Training and Education



Organizational Culture
and Social Support



Organizational Systems
and Governance



Health and Fitness
Outcomes

Wellness
Behaviors



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Training and Education



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Organizational Systems
and Governance

HEALTH & FITNESS OUTCOMES

Cancer	Immune Function
Cardiovascular Disease	Occupational Longevity
Anxiety	Occupational Health & Safety
Depression	Quality of Life
Respiratory Function	Reproductive Health

WELLNESS BEHAVIORS

Sleep & Recovery



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SUPPORTING WELLNESS

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Exposure Control
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Environmental Restructuring
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Fatigue Management
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Health and Safety
Training and Education



Organizational Culture
and Social Support



Organizational Systems
and Governance

HEALTH & FITNESS OUTCOMES

Cancer	Reproductive Health
Cardiovascular Disease	Occupational Longevity
Anxiety	Occupational Health & Safety
Depression	Quality of Life
Respiratory Function	

WELLNESS BEHAVIORS

Mindfulness & Self Regulation	Dietary Habits & Nutrition
Physical Activity & Exercise	Sleep & Recovery



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Environmental Restructuring
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Fatigue Management
and Occupational Resilience



Health and Safety
Training and Education



Organizational Culture
and Social Support



Organizational Systems
and Governance

HEALTH & FITNESS OUTCOMES

Cardiovascular Disease

Resilience

Type 2 Diabetes

Fatigue Resistance

Obesity

Occupational Recovery

Musculoskeletal Injuries

Occupational Performance

Anxiety

Occupational Longevity

Depression

Quality of Life

Burnout

Occupational Longevity

WELLNESS BEHAVIORS

Mindfulness & Self Regulation

Dietary Habits & Nutrition

Physical Activity & Exercise

Sleep & Recovery



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Exposure Control
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Environmental Restructuring
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Fatigue Management
and Occupational Resilience



Health and Safety
Training and Education



Organizational Culture
and Social Support



Organizational Systems
and Governance

HEALTH & FITNESS OUTCOMES

Cancer

Anxiety

Cardiovascular Disease

Resilience

Musculoskeletal Injuries

Occupational Performance

Depression

Occupational Health & Safety

WELLNESS BEHAVIORS

Mindfulness & Self Regulation

Dietary Habits & Nutrition

Physical Activity & Exercise

Sleep & Recovery



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Exposure Control
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Environmental Restructuring
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Fatigue Management
and Occupational Resilience



Health and Safety
Training and Education



Organizational Culture
and Social Support



Organizational Systems
and Governance

HEALTH & FITNESS OUTCOMES

Cancer	Physical Resilience
Anxiety	Fatigue Resistance
Depression	Occupational Performance
Burnout	Occupational Longevity
Resilience	Occupational Health & Safety
Relationships	Quality of Life

WELLNESS BEHAVIORS

Mindfulness & Self Regulation	Dietary Habits & Nutrition
Physical Activity & Exercise	Sleep & Recovery
Social Connection & Support	



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Exposure Control
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Environmental Restructuring
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Fatigue Management
and Occupational Resilience



Health and Safety
Training and Education



Organizational Culture
and Social Support



Organizational Systems
and Governance

HEALTH & FITNESS OUTCOMES

Cancer	Musculoskeletal Injuries
Cardiovascular Disease	Occupational Recovery
Obesity	Occupational Longevity
Cardiorespiratory Health	Occupational Health & Safety
Metabolic Health	

WELLNESS BEHAVIORS

Sleep & Recovery	Dietary Habits & Nutrition
Physical Activity & Exercise	



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RESTORING WELLNESS

Facilitate Recovery, Resilience and Reintegration



Rehabilitation and
Clinical Recovery



Return to Work
and Reintegration



Peer Support
and Operational Recovery

Specific Guidelines and
Recommendations for...

Musculoskeletal Injury

Chronic Illness

Mental Health

Burn Injury

Voluntary Leave



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PROMOTING WELLNESS

Prioritize Planning and Program Implementation

The Implementation Roadmap aims to support HOW wellness activities are planned, delivered and evaluated within local conditions

IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

- 1 Setting the Context
Establish an oversight committee and the initial conditions
- 2 Exploration and Preparation
Define the program outcomes and identify activity options
- 3 Planning and Resourcing
Create an actional plan, secure resources, identify key personnel
- 4 Initial Implementation
Launch first activities, solicit feedback, measure outcomes
- 5 Expansion and Sustainability
Integrate program into the organizational structure and culture



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Best Practice Guidelines

Planning principles or boundary conditions that inform the design and execution of wellness and fitness activities

Shared Guidelines

Apply broadly across all components within a chapter (e.g., 5 behaviors)

Specific Guidelines

Apply to one specific components in each chapter (e.g., Sleep & Recovery)

WHY

Activity and purpose

WHEN

Timing and scheduling

WHAT

Scope and activity components

WHERE

Environment and location

WHO

Roles and responsibilities

HOW

Execution and safeguarding



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Recommendations

Planning principles or boundary conditions that inform the design and execution of wellness and fitness activities

Organization-Level

Fire Fighter-Level

Shared Recommendations

Apply broadly across all components within a chapter (e.g., 5 behaviors)

Specific Recommendations

Apply to one specific components in each chapter (e.g., Sleep & Recovery)



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CASE EXAMPLE 1

IMPLEMENTATION MILESTONES



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Define Wellness

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Case Example Section 3

Each of the 12 lessons outlined below was drawn from conversations with the department's stakeholders. While no two departments are the same, these lessons highlight common challenges and practical strategies that others may find useful.

- 1. Rebuilding Trust Takes Time and Action.** Early versions of fitness testing were seen as punitive. Even with new policies in place, trust had to be rebuilt.
- 2. Balancing Attendance and Participation Can Build Engagement.** Shifting to a model where attendance was expected but participation was voluntary helped increase buy-in.
- 3. Start Small to Build Trust and Momentum.** Launching all at once created early challenges. A smaller rollout could have built early support and helped fix issues before scaling.
- 4. Follow-Up Turns Results into Action.** Without help understanding their results, many members didn't know what to do after their assessment.
- 5. Clear Medical Policies Prevent Uncertainty.** When serious health concerns are flagged, the next steps weren't always clear. A written policy that outlines what happens next can build trust.
- 6. Group-Level Data Has Value—If It's Used.** The department received annual health reports, but without a clear process to interpret or act on them, opportunities may be missed.
- 7. Culture, Trust, and Timing Matter.** The success of the program depended not just on the content but also on when and how it was introduced.
- 8. Who Delivers the Program May Matter Most.** The experience of the fitness assessment varied greatly depending on the assigned PFT. Trainer credibility, preparation, and attitude are important.
- 9. The Message and the Messenger Matter.** Members were more likely to trust and participate when the message came from someone they respected.
- 10. Station Culture Can Influence Program Participation.** Even with consistent policies, participation differed by crew. Peer dynamics and informal leadership influence member engagement.
- 11. Leadership Sets the Tone.** Small actions from leaders at all levels sent a strong signal that the program mattered. When leaders modeled participation, members were more likely to follow.
- 12. Programs Must Be Built to Outlast People.** Early success depended on a few committed individuals, but sustainable programs are built to continue, even when key people change roles.



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CANCER IS THE **#1 KILLER OF FIRE FIGHTERS**

Comprehensive cancer risk
reduction initiatives are needed



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What Influences Fire Fighters'
Cancer Risk?



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DEFINING WELLNESS

Supporting Evidence

Modifiable Risk Factors

1. Inconsistent SCBA Use.
2. Inadequate Gear Decontamination.
3. Poor Station Air Quality.
4. Unhealthy Lifestyle Habits.
5. Tobacco and Excessive Alcohol Use.
6. No Health Screenings.

Non-Modifiable Risk Factors

1. Advanced Age and Career Exposure.
2. Genetic Predisposition and Family History.
3. Biological Sex.
4. Service Before Modern Protections.
5. Personal Medical History.
6. Community and Environmental Conditions.



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PURSUING WELLNESS

Supporting Evidence

Wellness Behaviors

1. Dietary Habits and Nutrition.
2. Physical Activity and Exercise
3. Sleep and Recovery



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SUPPORTING WELLNESS

Supporting Evidence

Operational Practices

1. Exposure Control and Decontamination.
2. Environmental Restructuring and Ergonomics
3. Health and Safety Training and Education
4. Organizational Culture and Support
5. Organizational Systems and Governance



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WFI Cancer Risk Reduction Guidance

Scope of Activities to Influence Cancer Risk

DEFINE

MEDICAL

Fitness

PURSUE

Mindfulness

NUTRITION

EXERCISE

SLEEP

Connection

SUPPORT

EXPOSURE CONTROL

ENVIRONMENT

Fatigue Management

TRAINING

CULTURE

GOVERNANCE

RESTORE

Clinical Recovery

Return to Work

Peer Support

Restore activities would be relevant to help manage and treat fire fighters with cancer



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PROMOTING WELLNESS

Prioritize Planning and Program Implementation

Identify feasible activities, actionable steps and key stakeholders to contribute to the cancer risk reduction efforts

IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

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Setting the Context

WFI Implementation Roadmap Stage 1

Actionable Steps within Stage 1

1. Establish an oversight committee with labor and management representation
2. Identify a desired timeline and funding sources for potential activities
3. Establish the initial (current) conditions and constraints that may impact implementation efforts



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Exploration and Preparation

WFI Implementation Roadmap Stage 2

Actionable Steps within Stage 2

1. Explore possible activity options that align with target outcomes and initial conditions (review Best Practice Guidelines)
2. Select program activities that are feasible, impactful, and complementary to be prioritized within the initial implementation efforts



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DEFINING WELLNESS

Best Practice Guidelines

Medical / Cancer Screening

Implement a Comprehensive Assessment / Screen

Departments shall implement and maintain a validated medical assessment battery with clearly defined clinical triggers and referral pathways, appropriate to role and risk.

Promote the Purpose and Value of Assessments

Establish a communication strategy to promote the aims and personal benefits of medical and fitness assessments

Provide Clear and Actionable Feedback

Provide members with timely, confidential and personalized feedback based on assessment results, and offer access to supports or referrals to address identified needs.

Enable Consistent Scheduling and Delivery

Enable the delivery of assessments annually and maintain policies that support consistent scheduling across members' career.

Create Safe Assessments Environments

Provide safe, private, and accessible spaces and equipment for conducting assessments and screening.

Establish Oversight and Accountability

Establish a multidisciplinary committee to oversee the implementation and evaluation of the assessment and screening.



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Best Practice Guidelines

Physical Activity and Exercise

Provide Access to Exercise Programming

Provide access to comprehensive exercise programs that are scalable to individual needs, accommodating of diverse interests and accessible on- and off-duty.

Enable Flexible On-Duty Exercise Time

Provide personnel with access to flexibly scheduled on-duty exercise time that accommodates different shifts, roles, and operational demands.

Support Goal Setting and Habit Formation

Establish systems that promote participation and help members set goals, track progress, and build sustainable habits and routines.

Make Exercise Spaces and Equipment Accessible

Ensure equitable access to exercise and physical activity spaces, equipment, and movement-related resources.

Support Qualified Fitness Leads

Designate and support qualified peer fitness trainers or exercise professionals with defined roles and responsibilities, training standards, and quality-assurance procedures.

Identify and Address Potential Obstacles

Identify and address barriers that limit the adoption of supportive physical activity habits.



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SUPPORTING WELLNESS

Best Practice Guidelines

Exposure Control / Decontamination

Prioritize Exposure Control in Support of Health

Prioritize exposure control to reduce acute and cumulative exposure to hazardous substances encountered during fire service operations.

Maintain Decon Infrastructure and Standards

Establish and maintain exposure control infrastructure and operational standards for gear, equipment, and practices before, during, and after incidents.

Deliver Exposure Control Training

Deliver recurring operational training on exposure risks, controls, and decontamination practices tailored to member roles and responsibilities.

Establish Contamination Zones

Designate and maintain clean, transition, and contaminated zones within stations, apparatus, and incident sites.

Assign Exposure Control Oversight

Assign exposure control oversight to designated personnel and define governance structures with clear authority and accountability.

Reinforce Exposure Control Practices

Reinforce exposure control practices through leadership modeling, peer messaging, and consistent supervisory expectations.



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Planning and Resourcing

WFI Implementation Roadmap Stage 3

Actionable Steps within Stage 3

1. Identify the specific activities that will be delivered during the initial implementation (review WFI Recommendations)
2. Describe the supports needed to enable each activity (preparation, delivery and evaluation).
3. Outline actionable steps to prepare, deliver and evaluate each activity.



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DEFINING WELLNESS

Organization-Level Recommendations

Medical / Cancer Screening

Deliver a Comprehensive Medical Assessment

Adopt and deliver a validated medical assessment battery consistent with NFPA standards, that is available to all personnel.

Promote the Personal Benefit

Distribute communication materials that explain the purpose, process, and personal benefits of all assessments.

Establish Assessment Oversight Structures

Formalize the structure of an assessment oversight committee, including membership composition, meeting frequency, and reporting responsibilities.

Fund Assessment Operations

Allocate an annual budget to support assessment operations, facilities, staffing, and data systems.

Implement Data Governance and Privacy Protocols

Implement data governance procedures that align with local and federal regulations to ensure data security and confidentiality.

Summarize Assessment Participation and Outcomes

Produce an annual report on assessment participation, health and fitness trends and ROI metrics, shared with leadership, labor, and members.



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DEFINING WELLNESS

Organization-Level Recommendations

Physical Activity and Exercise

Delivery Structured Exercise Programming

Deliver structured physical activity/exercise programming that can reduce cancer risk factors while accommodating diverse interests, abilities, needs, and schedules, and is accessible on- and off-duty.

Reinforce Exercise Habits Among Recruits

Deliver exercise programs for recruits and probationary members with minimum and target expectations to reinforce their physical activity habits and improve cancer outcomes.

Adopt an On-Duty Exercise Policy

Adopt and reinforce a written scheduling policy that provides flexible on-duty exercise time across shifts, roles, and call volumes.

Designate Exercise Space and Secure Equipment

Create and maintain a facilities and equipment plan that designates and adapts spaces to ensure equitable access to exercise across stations and shifts.

Identify and Support Exercise Ambassadors

Designate a coordinator and/or establish a committee to oversee all exercise-related initiatives and support peer fitness ambassadors to facilitate program delivery.

Enable Peer-Led Exercise Programs

Create systems and infrastructure such that exercise programs can be led or supported by peer fitness ambassadors and/or program coordinators.



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Reinforce Behaviors that Lead to Better Outcomes

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SUPPORTING WELLNESS

Build Operational Systems that Make Healthy Choices Possible

Exposure Control / Decontamination

Document Exposures and Link to Medical Screening

Develop process for all fire and chemical exposures, directly linked to incident reports and individual exposure tracking systems, with outputs integrated into ongoing medical screening.

Use Ventilated Gear Storage and Extractors

Equip new stations and apparatus with ventilated or enclosed gear storage and extractors and, where feasible, retrofit existing stations and apparatus to meet these standards.

Install Hygiene Infrastructure

Install and maintain hygiene fixtures and supplies at stations and on apparatus, including handwashing stations, boot brushes, wipes, and sealed bags, to support gross and secondary decon.

Ensure Access to Clean Turnout Gear

Provide members with access to a secondary set of clean turnout gear, or establish shared gear arrangements to ensure clean gear availability following decontamination.

Deliver Exposure Control Training

Deliver role-specific exposure control training, including recruit orientation and recurring refreshers, covering gross and secondary decontamination, SCBA and gear cleaning, and station zoning.

Deploy On-Scene Decontamination

Deploy an on-scene decontamination setup at every structure fire or IDLH event, appropriate to operational conditions.



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45% of on-duty fire fighter deaths come from sudden cardiac events

Most are driven by untreated heart disease

BE  HEALTHY.

How would you use the WFI to reduce members' CVD risk?



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INJURIES DON'T JUST HURT THEY END CAREERS

Musculoskeletal injuries are the leading cause of lost time and early retirement in the fire service

65%

About two thirds of all fire fighter injuries are the result of sprains and strains

50%

About half of all fire fighter injuries affect the low back, knees and shoulders

35%

Only one third of fire fighter injuries occur on the fireground; most occur while performing other duties

How would you use the WFI to reduce members' injury risk?



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IGNITING CHANGE

Diving into the WFI Pillars



SECURE YOUR F2T CECs!

- If you are a Wellness Fitness Ambassador or Peer Fitness Trainer, scan the QR code to submit your attendance and earn your CEC!

