

Fire chiefs and cancer

The Dispatch asked 360 fire chiefs about the cancer risk their firefighters face and what safety measures have been implemented in their departments. The survey showed that many departments have not enforced training or prevention policies, especially in rural fire departments.

Safety precautions

Cleaning gear, wearing special hoods, taking showers and wearing masks during and after fires are key measures to help minimize firefighters' contact with toxic chemicals. A survey of fire chiefs in Ohio found that rural departments and those staffed only by volunteers struggle to meet these goals.

Type of Department	Each firefighter has one set of gear	Each firefighter has two sets of gear	Gear is cleaned after a fire by a machine at the station	Gear is cleaned after a fire by the firefighter	Gear is not cleaned after a fire	Gear is sent out for professional cleaning after a fire	My department has a Nomex hood exchange program.	My department requires firefighters to shower within 60 minutes after leaving a fire.	My department requires firefighters to wear self-contained breathing apparatus at all times in hazardous environments.
Rural	88.6%	11.4%	56.9%	30.5%	11%	1.2%	23.6%	14.2%	86.6%
Suburban	53.2	46.8	87.2	9.6	2.1	1.1	48.9	37.2	94.7
Urban	45	55	85	5	0	0	45	25	95
All volunteer	89.4	10.6	46	37.3	15.5	1.2	17.4	12.4	84.5

Source: Dispatch analysis of survey of 360 Ohio fire chiefs

Best practices

The key to curbing cancer among firefighters begins with their administrations. Experts says the most-proactive departments have cancer-prevention training, written policies and showers at their stations. Here's a look at the percentage of fire departments in Ohio that have implemented these best practices.

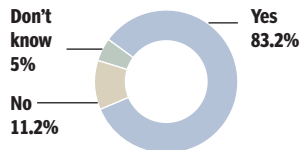
Type	Training	Policy	Station showers
Rural department	46.3%	42.3%	63%
Suburban department	71.3	63.8	92.6
Urban department	80	70	95

Sources: Dispatch analysis of a survey of 360 Ohio fire chiefs

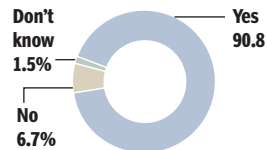
Chemical threat

Fire chiefs were asked if they thought their firefighters believed there was a link between chemical exposure and cancer. Then firefighters were asked whether they themselves believed there was a link. Their responses show that firefighters might not believe in a cancer link as much as their bosses think they do.

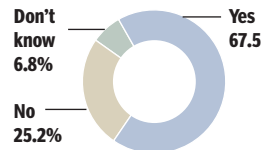
Fire chief at volunteer fire department



Chief with paid staff



Professional firefighters



Source: Dispatch analysis of survey data from 360 Ohio fire chiefs and 1,288 professional firefighters