

Recommendations

The overall purpose of this project is to develop a strategy for designing and implementing a wellness and fitness program that fire rescue departments will use and will benefit from. It is imperative to have a clear understanding of the many challenges of implementing a mandatory wellness and fitness program. These processes involve a multifaceted strategy to effectively design and implement a program and requires overall support from upper management. Research reveals that a wellness program must be mandatory, convenient for members to access, individualized in measure, personally rewarding, and cost effective.

Review of the research reveals that fire fighter wellness and fitness is imperative for job tasks and prevention of premature illness, injury or death. Furthermore, this research identified several components that could be incorporated into a wellness and fitness program:

1. Adopt NIOSH and USFA recommendations: phase in a mandatory wellness/fitness program for fire fighters to reduce the risk factors for cardiovascular disease and improve cardiovascular capacity.
2. Provide annual medical physicals with a stress test (NFPA 1582 7.4.2 states it shall be acceptable for certain components of the annual occupational medical evaluation be performed by a member's private physician, provided full NFPA 1582 results are forwarded in the required time frame to the fire department physician).
3. Establish a Wellness and Fitness Coordinator position (in addition to a Health and Safety Officer) and form a Wellness and Fitness Committee (NFPA 1582: 3.3.9-12) consisting of the Fire Chief, Fire Department Physician, Battalion Chief, Health and Safety Officer, Wellness and Fitness Coordinator, a Union representative, and at least two peer trainers.
4. Perform annual fitness assessments to ensure fire fighters are physically capable of performing essential job tasks. Adopt portions of NFPA 1500 10.2.1 shall develop physical performance requirements for candidates and members and shall be annually tested.
5. Provide a two-year phase-in period for incumbents before they are required to take the annual fitness assessment and then use the first-year testing as the baseline to develop a tracking system for improvements.
6. Adopt NFPA 1582 8.2.1 members who do not meet the required level of physical performance shall not be permitted to engage in emergency operations and shall enter into a physical performance rehabilitation program to facilitate the progress in attaining a level of performance commensurate with the individuals assigned duties.
7. Adopt portions of the Joint Labor Management Wellness Fitness Initiative including mandatory annual fitness assessments; positive individualized wellness/fitness training and education; non-punitive; behavioral health; and a program available to retirees,
8. Adopt the IAFC candidate physical ability test (CPAT) for new hires.
9. Provide the Wellness and Fitness Program a budget for equipment, not only at headquarters, but at the fire stations to assist with uniformity and to provide accessibility to fitness equipment.
10. NFPA 1583 (5.2.4) If a member returns to duty after an extended leave of illness or injury, the wellness/fitness coordinator shall develop an exercise program for that member under the direction of the fire department physician.
11. Provide an incentive program, such as a point system or an honor badge if member attains a certain level of fitness excellence. Provide awards and honors at the end of each year. Provide annual pay incentive and/or paid leave.