



Injuries to Oklahoma Volunteer Firefighters

Overview

While injuries to firefighters will occur due to the dangers of the job, most injuries and fatalities are preventable. At Oklahoma State University Fire Service Training (OSU FST) training firefighters to work safely is our highest priority. Virtually all courses contain a safety component. Several courses are specifically dedicated to safety operations at emergency operations. There are two areas which require additional training based on national and state statistics: firefighter cardiovascular health and driver/operator training.

Firefighter Injury/Fatality Statistics

When addressing injuries to volunteer firefighters there are two sources for accurate firefighter injury and fatality statistics in Oklahoma: the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS), a program of the U.S. Fire Administrations and coordinated in Oklahoma by the State Fire Marshal Office, and data from underwriters, specifically CompSource Oklahoma. The following national statistics are taken from U.S. Fire Administration NFIRS reports. Oklahoma's experience is consistent with national statistics.

- Each year in the United States approximately 90 firefighters die in the line of duty. Of those, approximately 60% are volunteer firefighters. Of the volunteers who die in the line of duty, those from rural communities are the most likely to be killed in the line of duty.
- The most frequent cause of line of duty death is cardiovascular incidents, approximately 57% of deaths. The next most frequent cause of line of duty deaths is traffic collisions, approximately 24%.
- 35% of all reported firefighter injuries occur to volunteer firefighters.
- The most frequent cause of firefighter injuries is overexertion/strain, approximately 25% of reported injuries. The next most frequent cause is exposure to hazards, approximately 21%.
- 38% of all fire-related injuries to firefighters result in lost work time.
- Injuries to volunteer firefighters are sustained predominately by younger members of the departments. Firefighters under the age of 25 account for 29% of injuries.
- Only 3.3% of injuries occur when driving or riding in a vehicle. However, these events result in 24% of the deaths. This indicates that when vehicle incidents occur, the injuries to firefighters are critical in nature.

OSU FST Safety Training Courses

Virtually all of OSU FST's training courses have a safety component, there are several courses which are dedicated to safety operations or have a significant impact on operational safety.

National Fire Academy Incident Safety Officer Course (ISO): This is a two day course that was developed by the National Fire Academy. The goal of the course is to prepare firefighters and fire officers to perform the role of safety officer at emergency incidents.

- Since 2008, OSU FST has delivered 10 ISO courses, reaching 192 students, 107 of which were volunteers.
- OSU FST delivered a Train-the-Trainer ISO course in 2009 reaching 13 students from 5 fire departments.
- There is no registration fee for this course. The cost of delivery is paid through a grant from the National Fire Academy.

Emergency Vehicle Driver Training Course (EVDT): This is a 12 hour course which addresses the basic skills required to safely operate an emergency vehicle.

- Since 2008, OSU FST has delivered or sponsored 220 classes reaching 2,094 volunteer firefighters and EMTs.
- For volunteer firefighters, there is no registration fee for this course. The cost of the course is paid through the state appropriation dedicated to the training of volunteers.

National Incident Management System Courses (NIMS): There are numerous NIMS courses which provide training on how to integrate the incident management system into emergency operations. A primary focus of all these courses is improving the safety of each operation, regardless of its size. The basic NIMS courses are mandatory for all firefighters.

- There is no registration fee for these courses. The Oklahoma Office of Homeland Security provides the funding for this training and is a primary partner for OSU FST.
- These courses address the leadership element of safety during emergency operations. Command leadership must be a focus of any safety training program.

Cardiovascular Health and Wellness: OSU FST is one of the partners in the Oklahoma Firefighter Health Initiative.

- This initiative was the vision of Fire Marshal Robert Doke. Other partners include the Oklahoma Council on Firefighter Training, Oklahoma State Fire Marshal, Oklahoma State Department of Health, University of Oklahoma College of Public Health, Oklahoma State University College of Education, Oklahoma State Firefighters Association and the Oklahoma Fire Chiefs Association.
- The focus of the initiative is improving the cardiovascular health of all Oklahoma firefighters.
- Grant funding for the initiative is being sought through the U.S. Fire Administration.
- This initiative supports the efforts of the Oklahoma Council on Firefighter Training in its partnership with Integris to foster cardiovascular health in Oklahoma firefighters.