



Fire Chiefs' Association of Broward County

Standard Operating Guidelines

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Subject: Firefighter Decontamination

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I. Purpose:

- A. To provide guidance and direction to all personnel in protecting themselves from possible toxins and carcinogenic environments and minimizing exposure to carcinogens and other toxins.
- B. To establish procedures for the cleaning/decontamination of personnel and their protective clothing and equipment. Soiled or contaminated protective garments and equipment are a hazard to firefighters, as soils and contaminants can be flammable, toxic, or carcinogenic. Additionally, soiled or contaminated protective garments may result in reduced protective performance.

II. General Information:

- A. This guideline directs personnel in being proactive in taking steps to reduce their exposure to carcinogens and other contaminants that result from fires and training incidents.
- B. This guideline shall apply to all personnel involved in any incident, or training activity that is large in size, long in duration, and/or is labor intensive. Special attention shall be directed to those incidents where fatigue and/or exposures to environmental or operational conditions exist, or when deemed necessary by the IC or Training Coordinator.

III. Definition(s):

On-Scene Decontamination: the removal of hazardous substances (bacteria, chemicals, radioactive materials) from employees' bodies, clothing, equipment, tools, and/or sites to the extent necessary to prevent the occurrences of adverse health and/or environmental effects. Decontamination should also make safe by eliminating or reducing poisonous or otherwise harmful substances, such as noxious chemicals or radioactive materials.

IV. Responsibilities:

- A. **All Personnel** will take proactive steps in reducing their exposure to carcinogens. These steps include wearing SCBA from initial fire attack through overhaul activities, performing a gross decon at the fire scene, cleaning all exposed skin with wipes prior to reporting to rehab and completing a more thorough cleaning of PPE at the station.
- B. **Company Officers:** All supervisors will monitor the decontamination process starting with gross decon, to personal cleaning with wipes and finally a thorough cleaning at the station. Supervisors should also make sure all steps are completed to reduce secondary exposure to carcinogens, such as bagging of contaminated PPE.
- C. The Incident Commander or designee shall assign staff to establish a Decon area and make sure the personnel assigned are properly protected from secondary exposure. The IC and Rehab Officer together will make certain the rehab area does not get exposed to carcinogens.

V. **Procedure:**

Firefighter Decontamination: Should occur prior to reporting to rehab. The establishment of a Decon area should be similar to a HazMat approach, whereas, the hot zone is the area between the fire and the engine being utilized as a decontamination area. The warm zone is the location the decontamination will occur. The cold zone is near the IC and Rehab area. To minimize exposure to carcinogens and other toxins, multiple actions should be taken when operating on any incident scene where carcinogens or other toxins may be present. There are also actions that should be taken back at the station to further reduce personnel exposure.

A. **Establishing a Decon Group**

1. Once fire attack is initiated, an available Driver will be assigned by the IC to set up for post fire decontamination. The timing and location of decontamination set-up will be at the discretion of the IC, or his/her designee, but prior to personnel doffing equipment.
1. Decontamination equipment will consist of, but not limited to: bucket w/lid, decontamination solution/mild soap (NFPA recommended spot detergent or similar, small whisk broom, long handle scrub brush, Low flow hoseline with nozzle (collapsible 75' hose and garden nozzle), large tarp for staging of contaminated gear and personnel, spray nozzle, rescue wipes and a green decon cone.
2. The Driver assigned to decontamination shall protect themselves from exposures related to firefighters exiting the structure. SCBA should be considered. At a minimum, trauma sleeves, gloves, and N-95 mask shall be worn by those personnel providing decontamination efforts.
3. Upon exiting the structure, the firefighter shall report to the established decontamination area. The assigned Driver will brush off loose debris, hose off bunker gear and SCBA. A scrub brush will be used as necessary.
4. Prior to reporting to Rehab, remove as many carcinogens as possible by cleansing (soap/water, rescue wipes, etc.) the head, neck, jaw, throat, nose, behind and in the ears and hands. It is recommended personnel clean themselves prior to any food or water consumption.
5. PPE shall be removed so that the firefighter remains on air as long as possible.
6. Firefighters will then be released from the decontamination area and are to report to REHAB as deemed necessary by the IC.
7. Once fire ground operations are complete, each firefighter/exposed personnel shall place their soiled PPE in a heavy duty garbage bag for transport back to the station for cleaning and possibly gear exchange.
8. It is recommended that contaminated gear leaving the fire scene not be transported openly in the operating cab of any unit. Contaminated gear should be bagged and sealed prior to transport from the scene or area the contamination occurred.
9. All tools, equipment, and SCBA bottles will be cleaned.
10. Nomex hoods will be exchanged and washed.
11. The Officer shall report to the Battalion Chief once decontamination has been completed.

B. **Location of the Rehab and Decon Area**

- 1 **Decon Area Characteristics:** Should be near an available engine with a stretched low flow line, 25-50 feet away from the engine to avoid vehicle exhaust.
- 2 The water runoff from the gear decontamination should not flow into an open body of water or a storm drain.
- 3 A red tarp should be laid out between the decon area and rehab, preferably in the shade, to keep all PPE out of rehab.

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