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History

abstracted from: <https://100years.iaff.org/>

- The IAFF is organized on February 28, 1918, as 36 delegates representing 24 local fire fighter unions convene in Washington, DC.
 - The IAFF adopts 20 resolutions to benefit fire fighters and the fire service, including a two-platoon system, pension laws, automatic sprinkler systems, building inspections and removal of hazards for fire prevention.
 - The inaugural issue of the International Fire Fighter magazine is published – 10,000 copies are distributed. The cost of a yearly subscription is \$1.
 - Nationwide influenza epidemic incapacitates and kills fire fighters across the United States.
- 1918 poem
 - “Yes, this life may seem rather easy,
This waitin’ around for the bell.
But just put this down for your motto,
That when it ain’t easy – it’s hell.”
William B. George, Captain No. 8, Hose Co., Local No. 64, Kansas City, KS
- 1921: In a study of 1,624 Philadelphia fire fighters, doctors conclude that no actual diseases or illnesses are directly attributable to the occupation of firefighting.
- 1921: IAFF secures group life insurance policy for members. The \$500 policies cost members 60 cents per month.



ROUND TABLE



- 1923:
 - Canadian Director General Colonel Charles A. Hodgetts recommends that all fire fighters become competent in first aid to provide emergency relief to injured persons. He offers to pay for course instruction and textbooks.
 - The IAFF reports on oral cancer prevention recommendations and urges members to keep their mouths clean by daily scrubbing and gargling with soap and water.
- 1926:
 - IAFF publishes letter shared by Albert E. Guinness of the Uniformed Firemen's Association advocating for the right of fire fighters to recover from injuries caused while fighting fires.
- 1930:
 - A new invention called the smoke eater, a hydraulic pump and fan with a large tube attachment to remove smoke and gas, is credited with saving New York City's fire fighters' lives.
- 1935:
 - Montana becomes the first state in the country to establish an eight-hour workday for fire fighters.
 - The IAFF reports that 35 states have pension laws and six have unemployment insurance.
- 1935:
 - Pennsylvania is first state to enact a heart and lung presumption law.
- 1938:
 - According to Max H. Skolnick MD, trauma is seen as a factor in dementia praecox, Pott's disease and pulmonary tuberculosis among fire fighters. The



ROUND TABLE

first article in a series on heart disease among fire fighters is published in the International Fire Fighter. "Although dementia praecox is a very common occurrence, and it is easily recognized by its appearance and subsequent behavior, it nevertheless presents in its entirety, many baffling details. The etiology is as yet only incompletely solved. Adding to this complexity, trauma is found to be a factor in a small percentage of cases."

- The IAFF sends a survey to 600 fire chiefs across the nation to ascertain compensable illnesses among fire fighters. Results show that only one-half of localities responding possess the capacity to recognize and compensate medical illnesses which result from firefighting duties. These include heart disease, tuberculosis, pneumonia and arthritis, among others.
- 1939:
 - The IAFF engaged its first medical advisor – Max H. Skolnick, MD of Detroit – to carry out research in the physical effects of firefighting with special attention to heart disease.
- 1940:
 - Dr. Max H. Skolnick begins to compile a registry of occupational and, therefore, compensable diseases and illnesses among firemen.
- 1948:
 - The IAFF publicizes a Journal of the American Medical Association review of the "Fire Fighters' Occupational Diseases" book by Max H. Skolnick, MD and IAFF Secretary-Treasurer George Richardson. The book chapters focus on heart disease, tuberculosis and pneumonia, among other occupational diseases.
- 1950:
 - The IAFF educates members on training in the use of three types of masks: the self-generating, the demand and the oxygen re-breathing types.
- 1953:
 - Carl W. Irwin, MD writes two articles describing occupational hazards facing fire fighters, both injury and disease related.
- 1954:
 - The IAFF works on the development of Group Life Insurance, hospital and surgical benefits for fire fighters and their dependents.
- 1955:
 - After two years of study, the IAFF formally approves the Group Life, Hospital-Surgical Plan for members, holding a reception for plan administrators. More than 1,000 fire fighters complete enrollment cards by October 1.
- 1956:
 - The IAFF creates a poster entitled, "The Facts of Life About Cancer!"
- 1957:
 - The IAFF encourages fire fighters to call their doctors for a cancer checkup.
 - William A. Sawyer, MD, encourages fire fighters to receive a polio vaccine to extend their life spans.
 - The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics releases work injury statistics for 1957. Results indicate that fire fighting is a dangerous profession in terms of both injuries and deaths.
- 1959:



ROUND TABLE

- To date, locals have donated \$2,334.15 to the John P. Redmond Research Fund, established at the 1958 IAFF Convention for research of occupational diseases among fire fighters.
- The IAFF publishes provisions of coverage of fire fighters by workmen's compensation statutes in each state and Canadian province.
- 1960:
 - At the invitation of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, IAFF President William D. Buck attends the President's Conference on Occupational Safety. More than 3,000 leaders from American industry, labor, agriculture, federal, state and local governments, insurance, education, health and private safety organizations attend the meeting in Washington, DC.
 - John A. Reed, MD addresses the problem of alcoholism, malingering and other medical and surgical care issues confronting the fire service.
 - The Common Council of St. John, New Brunswick, Canada adopts a heart and lung bill for fire fighters which will provide them with 60 percent of full salary on a disability retirement. In the United States, 10 states have passed heart bills, presuming that if a fire fighter is stricken with a heart ailment it was caused while he was performing his duty.
- 1961:
 - An IAFF survey of 1,200 communities indicates that deaths and injuries among fire fighters in the United States and Canada are rising.
 - Medical professionals describe the heart and lung dangers confronting fire fighters.
- 1962:
 - Workmen's Compensation laws for fire fighters are broadened in five provinces in Canada.
- 1964:
 - Dr. M. Howard Skolnick, who has served as medical advisor to the IAFF in an honorary capacity since 1939, is named medical advisor for the John P. Redmond Memorial Fund. Dr. Skolnick publishes an article connecting fire fighters' work conditions and their health. "Fire fighters often are not awarded compensation for illnesses acquired and aggravated in the performance of their duties. It is therefore apparent that responsible public officials should have a detailed understanding of the connection between fire fighters' working conditions and occupational diseases. This is the purpose of the Redmond Fund – to establish a medically sound and trustworthy basis for the recognition of certain diseases as occupational for fire fighters."
 - An IAFF report indicates that death and injury rates among fire fighters reach new highs.
- 1965:
 - The U.S. Department of Labor conducts the most extensive death and injury survey among fire fighters in the United States, with questionnaires being sent to 7,500 fire departments.
 - The IAFF death and injury survey reveals that each day, 109 professional fire fighters are injured in the line of duty, two are permanently disabled and one dies.



ROUND TABLE

- 1966:
 - The IAFF's Annual Death and Injury Survey reveals that fire fighters sustain injuries 3.5 times more frequently than the average industrial worker and the odds of being killed in the line of duty are nearly three times greater than that for the average employee in the overall workforce.
 - The IAFF Death and Injury Survey for 1966 cites data from 540 cities and confirms the dangers of the profession.
- 1968:
 - The IAFF publishes its annual death and injury survey, which reveals that fire fighters suffer a record number of injuries while on duty, as well as excessive cardiovascular disease deaths.
- 1969:
 - 39 states have laws providing for fire fighter compensation for service-connected heart and respiratory diseases. All Canadian provinces have such laws.
 - An in-depth study, "The American City and Its Organized Employees," reports that fire fighters are among the most heavily organized occupational group among all municipal employees.
- 1970:
 - Seven physician trustees of the John P. Redmond Memorial Fund meet on how to obtain more factual information about fire fighters' injuries and deaths and to make plans for future research in this area.
 - The "11th Annual IAFF Death and Injury Survey" shows firefighting as the most hazardous occupation for the first time, eclipsing previous front-runners: mining and quarrying professions.
 - The IAFF calls for the development of an adequate smoke mask for routine firefighting as current air masks have several disadvantages – too heavy, too bulky and not long lasting.
- 1971:
 - More than 300 delegates attend a symposium sponsored by the John P. Redmond Memorial Fund on occupational health and hazards facing the fire service. The theme of the symposium is "Survival." Topics include physical standards, heart disease, pulmonary and respiratory problems, protective equipment and vehicular design, training, safety education and recordkeeping and emergency care.
- 1973:
 - The IAFF reports that carbon dioxide emitted by burning fibers and plastic fumes cause smoke-related deaths among fire fighters. Tests showed that in Cambridge, Massachusetts, fire fighters were probably knocked out by a high level of carbon dioxide rather than by toxic gases. Evidence from fire tests with plastics and modern fibers shows that colorless, odorless fumes quickly displace oxygen and cause a dramatic rise in the carbon dioxide level in the atmosphere.
 - The IAFF "Annual Death and Injury Survey" reveals that fire fighters now can count on only a 50-50 chance of getting through a year's work without being injured.
- 1974:



- The IAFF “1974 Annual Death and Injury Survey” reveals that fire fighters are once again first in accidental work deaths per 100,000 persons.
- 1975:
 - NASA develops a Fire Fighters Breathing System (FBS), a new light-weight, long-duration breathing device with an improved face mask and tank.
 - The first in a series of reports for the “IAFF Safety and Health Kit” is released, providing specific standards for fire fighters’ helmets, boots, fire coats, protective trousers, respiratory devices, station uniforms and gloves.
- 1976:
 - The IAFF “Annual Death and Injury Survey” reveals that fire fighters suffer 90 accidental deaths per 100,000 workers – the highest of any profession.
- 1978:
 - UCLA researcher R. James Barnard, Ph.D. contends that 20 percent of fire fighters in some U.S. fire departments are “sure heart attack candidates.”
 - The IAFF “Annual Death and Injury Survey” finds that the fire fighter injury rate has skyrocketed to 55.6 per 100 workers. This is a 25 percent increase and is the highest in history. In addition, the number of fire fighters forced to retire because of occupational diseases increases dramatically.
- 1979:
 - The IAFF seeks to eliminate exclusions in the line-of-duty death benefits law. The Public Safety Officers Benefit (PSOB) Act of 1976 excludes from coverage fire fighter deaths caused by job-related diseases such as heart attacks.
 - The U.S. Fire Administration awards the IAFF a \$30,000 contract to develop a new set of data elements for more detailed reporting of fire fighter injuries and illnesses.
 - According to the U.S. Department of Labor, fire fighters are the most heavily organized group of public employees in the United States, with 72 percent holding union membership.
- 1981:
 - The IAFF’s “1980 Annual Death and Injury Survey” shows an increasing number of deaths from carcinogens.
 - A U.S. Air Force heart specialist recommends that there be a mandatory retirement age of 55 for all fire fighters. The basis for his controversial thesis is that routine stress tests are not sophisticated enough to detect hidden heart problems in many fire fighters and other more complicated, dangerous and expensive tests, such as cardiac catheterization and radionuclide imaging, would be too impractical and costly to administer. Further, since three out of four individuals 55 years and older have significant coronary artery disease, all fire fighters should be retired from firefighting duties at age 55.
- 1982:
 - California was the first state to enact firefighter cancer legislation.
 - A U.S. Air Force heart specialist recommends that there be a mandatory retirement age of 55 for all fire fighters. The basis for his controversial thesis is that routine stress tests are not sophisticated enough to detect hidden heart problems in many fire fighters and other more complicated, dangerous and expensive tests, such as cardiac catheterization and radionuclide



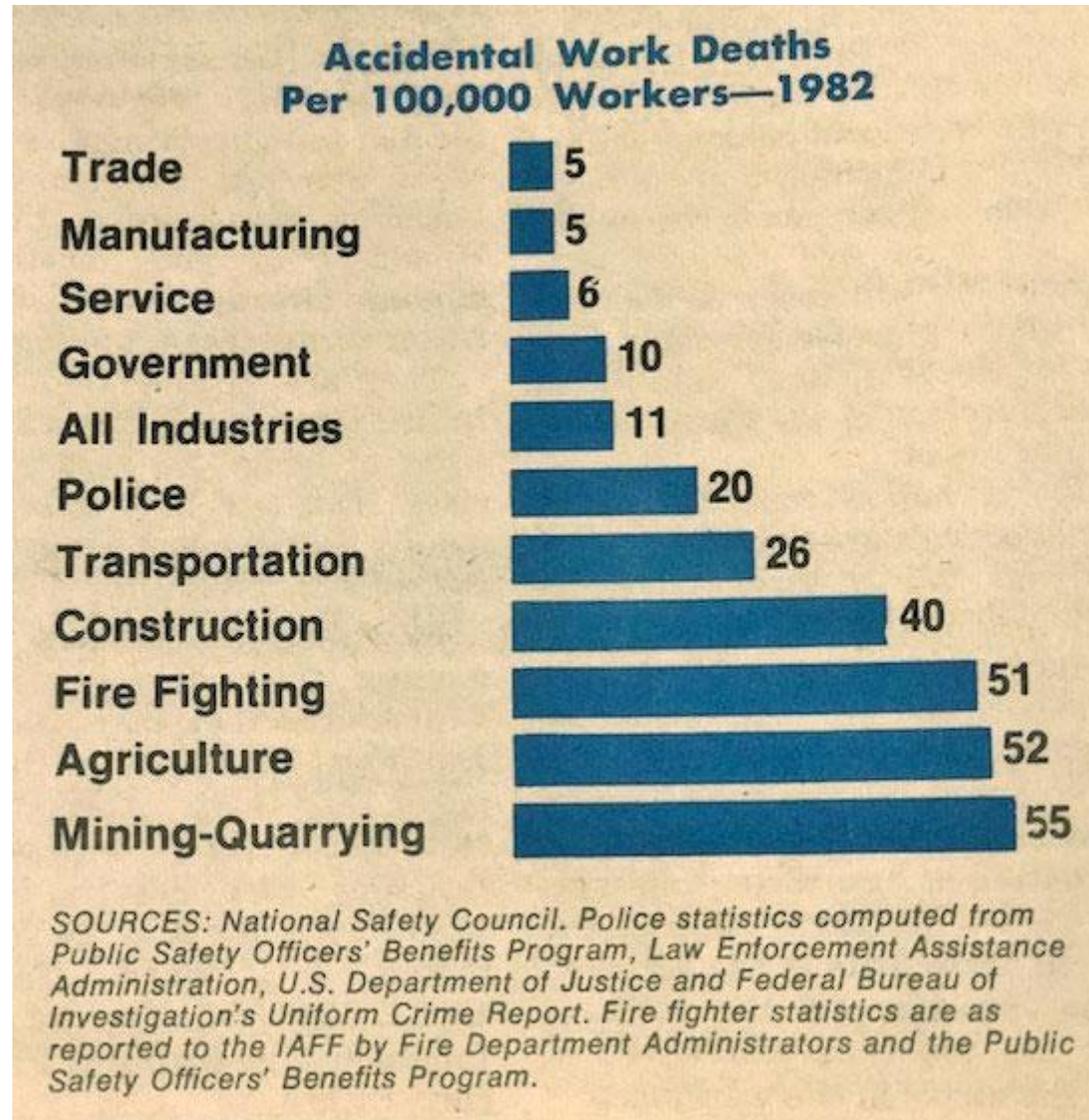
ROUND TABLE

imaging, would be too impractical and costly to administer. Further, since three out of four individuals 55 years and older have significant coronary artery disease, all fire fighters should be retired from firefighting duties at age 55.

- The IAFF's "1981 Annual Death and Injury Survey" shows a minimal increase in the number of occupational illness deaths. However, the causal factors of those deaths remain relatively constant: 60 percent due to heart disease, 33 percent due to cancer and 4 percent due to lung disease.
- 1984:
 - The IAFF reports on a Clemson University study that reveals that eating breakfast regularly may lower blood pressure.
 - The IAFF, in cooperation with the Mt. Sinai Medical Center in New York City, is undertaking a study of toxicity among fire fighters. The research is funded through a \$25,000 John P. Redmond Fund grant.
 - The IAFF publishes results of a study on the impact of stress on fire fighters' behavior. Some of the conclusions are that a considerable number of the causes of job-related stress are inherent in the job and that the best possible way to reduce their effect is for the individual to understand them as such and accept that reality.
 - The IAFF's "1982 Annual Death and Injury Survey" shows improvements in fire fighter health and safety. Fire fighters now lag behind agriculture and mining-quarrying for the number of accidental work deaths per 100,000 workers. The IAFF survey finds that approximately 90 percent of all fire fighters are wearing station uniforms made of non-flame-retardant fabrics.



ROUND TABLE



- 1985:
 - IAFF pressure leads to the EPA issuing regulations that would require the removal of thousands of electrical transformers containing PCB fluids from commercial buildings by 1990.
 - The IAFF's "1983 Annual Death and Injury Survey" shows of all deaths attributed to occupational diseases, 48 percent were caused by heart disease, 42 percent were due to cancer and 7 percent were caused by lung disease.
 - Arkansas Governor William (Bill) Clinton (D) signs state Senate Bill 306 into law as Act 839, which provides a \$100,000 line-of-duty death benefit for Arkansas fire fighters and police officers. The previous amount paid for a line-of-duty death by the state was \$10,000.
 - The IAFF, NIOSH and Johns Hopkins collaborate on a study to investigate reproductive defects among children of fire fighters due to hazardous workplace exposures.
- 1986:



ROUND TABLE

- Scientific studies indicate that fire fighters are at increased risk of developing hepatitis B.
- The IAFF signs an agreement with the Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health to use the IAFF as a training site for its post-graduate physicians pursuing residencies in occupational medicine.
- James M. Melius, MD, DrPH, chairman of the Medical Advisory Board, begins a two-part series on the physical demands of firefighting, as well as occupational exposures leading to cardiovascular disease, cancer and respiratory disease. He urges fire fighters to undergo a battery of medical tests following hazardous exposures.
- The IAFF's "1984 Annual Death and Injury Survey" reveals that line-of-duty deaths have been reduced by almost 40 percent.
- Representative Dennis Eckart of Ohio announces his intention to introduce the first federal infectious disease bill aimed at protecting fire fighters and emergency rescue and paramedic employees from a variety of infectious diseases, including Hepatitis B and AIDS.
- Researchers at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health begin a two-year study, Project Injury, aimed at making firefighting safer.
- 1988:
 - The IAFF's "1986 Annual Death and Injury Survey" reveals that of the 80 deaths attributable to occupational diseases, 56 percent were due to heart disease, 31 percent were caused by cancer and 8 percent were attributed to lung disease.
 - Fire fighters are warned that smoke inhalation increases cancer risk and thus they need to wear self-contained breathing apparatus when battling blazes.
 - NIOSH's Health Hazard Evaluation guide contains the most comprehensive medical surveillance program ever established for the fire service to evaluate respiratory complaints, neurological symptoms and dermatological problems among fire fighters, police officers and paramedics following a major chemical warehouse fire at the Research Organic, Inorganic Chemical Corporation in Sun Valley, California.
- 1989:
 - The IAFF's "1987 Annual Death and Injury Survey" reveals that work-related death rates among fire fighters have increased by 6 percent since 1986, despite no change in death rates for other high-risk occupations.
- 1990:
 - The IAFF's "1988 Annual Death and Injury Survey" places more emphasis on lost work time and premature fire fighter retirements caused by line-of-duty injuries, illnesses and contagious disease exposures. Fire fighter lost work hours resulting from line-of-duty injuries cost the public more than \$150 million in 1988.
- 1991:
 - Fire fighters are warned of common deadly chemicals that endanger their health: creosote, PCBs, plastics and pesticides. Two IAFF studies suggest that the heat of fighting fires and the many chemical fumes that fire fighters encounter may pose serious threats to reproductive health.
 - Given that the IAFF Death and Injury Survey statistics show that 40 percent of on-the-job injuries among fire fighters are sprains and strains, the IAFF



ROUND TABLE

recommends physical fitness programs as a way to cut injuries and reduce fatigue.

- Two independent public opinion surveys show that fire fighters and paramedics are more admired than any other professionals, and that Americans think fire fighters don't receive the recognition and appreciation they deserve.
- Infectious diseases, such as AIDS and Hepatitis B, pose a serious threat to fire fighters. About 4 percent of fire fighters contract infectious diseases each year.
- A new study shows that civilian EMS workers suffer considerably more stress than cross-trained fire fighter/paramedics.
- The IAFF's "1989 Annual Death and Injury Survey" confirms that firefighting remains one of the most dangerous occupations in North America.
- 1992:
 - The IAFF's "1990 Annual Death and Injury Survey" marks the most comprehensive compilation of such statistics for care of fire fighters in the history of the IAFF. Results show that career fire fighters suffer job-related injuries and illnesses at a rate that is more than four times higher and nine times more severe than the average for workers in the private industry. Similarly, the rate of line-of-duty deaths among career fire fighters is nearly three times that of workers in the private industry.
- 1995:
 - The IAFF's "1993 Annual Death and Injury Survey" reveals that more than 40 percent of professional fire fighters suffer injuries in the line of duty. In addition, professional fire fighters are five times more likely to be injured on the job than workers in the private industry, and the injuries are generally more severe.
 - Hundreds of fire fighters respond to a bomb blast that rips through the Alfred Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in April. IAFF General President Al Whitehead and other IAFF leaders visit the bomb site and meet with FEMA Director James Lee Witt to ensure that the needs of fire fighters are being met.
- 1996:
 - The IAFF's "1994 Annual Death and Injury Survey" demonstrates that firefighting remains the most dangerous occupation in the United States. In 1994, 45 professional fire fighters were killed in the line of duty, almost double the number from the previous year. More than 60 percent of these deaths were the result of burns or asphyxiation after being trapped.
- 1997:
 - The IAFF hosts an invitational Combat Challenge competition during the John P. Redmond Symposium in Toronto, Canada. After seven months of cooperation, the IAFF and the IAFC launch a major wellness-fitness initiative at the Symposium.
 - The Joint Labor Management Wellness-Fitness Task Force meets in Los Angeles County, California, to begin developing performance standards for professional fire fighters.
 - The IAFF's "1996 Annual Death and Injury Survey" demonstrates that communicable diseases are a growing threat to fire fighters, including tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, various strains of hepatitis and meningitis.
- 1999:

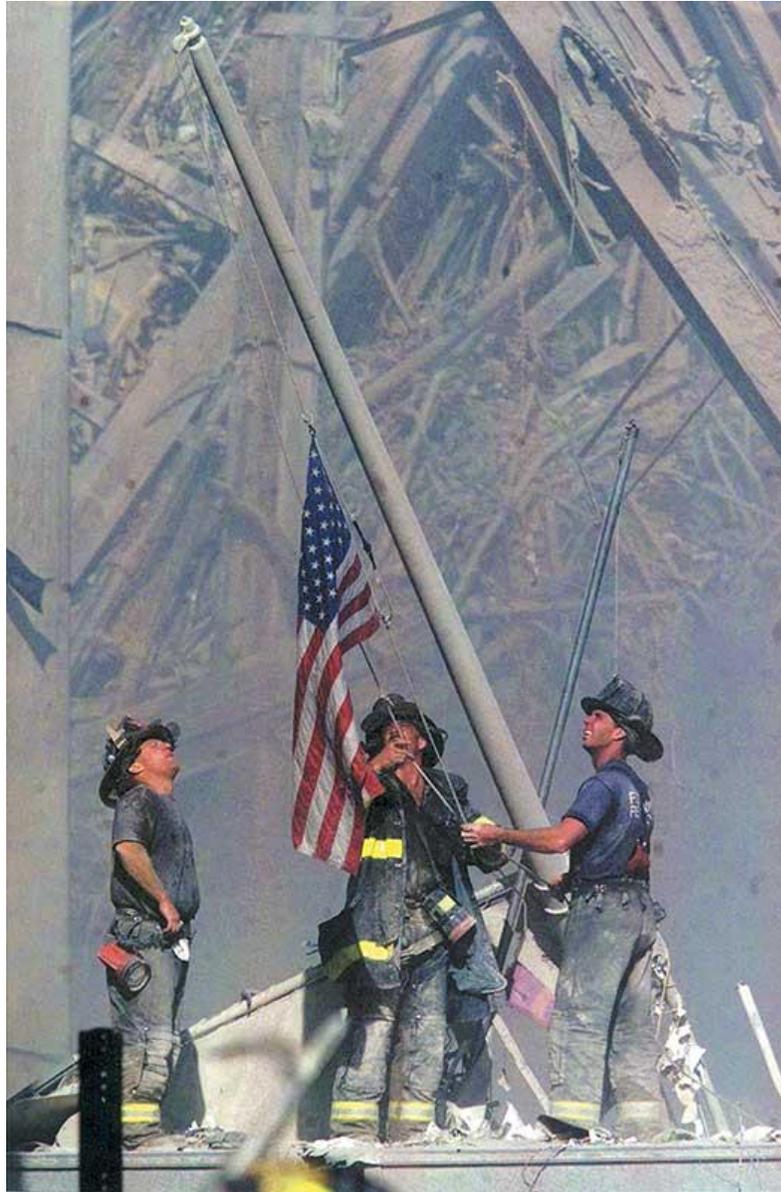


ROUND TABLE

- The IAFF raises concerns that a popular moisture barrier used in firefighting protective clothing is degrading in the field. Several garment manufacturers remove BREATHE-TEX moisture barrier materials from their inventory.
- The IAFF's "1997 Annual Death and Injury Survey" indicates that firefighting remains a dangerous profession. While structural fire suppression accounts for just 10 percent of all emergency scene alarms, two-thirds of all injuries occur on these calls.
- 2000:
 - The IAFF's Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT) gains ground across the nation as the recognized standard for fire fighter recruit testing. The CPAT was developed through the IAFF's partnership with the International Association of Fire Chiefs in the Joint Labor Management Wellness-Fitness Initiative.
- 2001:
 - The IAFF unveils a telephone-based counseling program to help members quit smoking.
 - 343 FDNY fire fighters die in the September 11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center twin towers. The IAFF [lists the fallen fire fighters by name](#) in the *International Fire Fighter*.



ROUND TABLE



- 2002:
 - The IAFF and IAFC collaborate to offer a peer fitness program for the fire service. This is the next phase in the organizations' Wellness-Fitness partnership. The IAFF and IAFC also release a new policy regarding how the Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT) program may be used to ensure its integrity.
- 2005:
 - An intensive lobbying effort by the British Columbia Professional Fire Fighters Association results in the provincial government passing presumptive cancer legislation.
- 2006:



ROUND TABLE

- Using data from NFPA, NIOSH, USFA and the IAFF, a new study reveals that 54 percent of fire fighters who died in the line of duty over a six-year period died because of health-related factors.
- The IAFF launches an online database to determine the nature and language of applicable presumptive laws in states and provinces.
- The IAFF launches “Fit to Survive,” a comprehensive online resource for improving fire fighters’ health and nutrition. General President Harold Schaitberger visits Station 25 in Fairfax County, Virginia to cook a healthy meal for members of Local 2068, the union he helped organize 30 years earlier.
- 2007:
 - Ontario legislators enact presumptive legislation protecting 10,000 IAFF members in the province. The legislation automatically awards workers’ compensation benefits to fire fighters who contract certain cancers or suffer heart injuries while performing their duties. More than 40 states and six Canadian provinces recognize certain illnesses as occupational hazards of firefighting and have enacted laws to safeguard workers’ compensation and retirement disability benefits for fire fighters.
- 2008:
 - The IAFF and Pfizer launch a “Campaign to Save Two Million Years of IAFF Life,” to help fire fighters stop smoking.
 - A new series of articles on “Working to Death” commences in the *International Fire Fighter* focusing on heart attacks, vehicle accidents and cancer.
 - The IAFF/IAFC Joint Labor-Management Wellness-Fitness Initiative (WFI) celebrates 10 years of keeping fire fighters safer and healthier. Two new projects are in the works: a self-survival training course and a heart disease prevention pilot program. In addition, the IAFF initiates a database to track occupational illnesses among fire service personnel.
- 2009:
 - The IAFF lobbies on the national, state and provincial levels for the passage of presumptive laws to ensure that members are protected. Forty-two states and seven provinces have some form of presumptive law in place.
- 2015:
 - The IAFF makes a \$50,000 contribution to the V Foundation for Cancer, established by ESPN and former North Carolina State University basketball coach Jim Valvano (Jimmy V) in 1993 just weeks before his death due to metastatic adenocarcinoma. The IAFF contribution is specifically earmarked for research for a cure for prostate cancer, which affects fire fighters at an alarming rate.
- 2016:
 - The number of states without presumptive legislation for fire fighters who contract cancer continues to shrink. Idaho is the 34th state to win presumptive protections. IAFF lobbying pushes Congress to consider establishing a fire fighter cancer registry.
- 2017:
 - Due in large part to IAFF’s efforts, 35 states and 11 provinces have presumptive laws that recognize cancers as job-related diseases.
 - The IAFF partners with NantHealth to promote the GPS Cancer profile, the only test that predicts a patient’s response to drugs used to treat cancer before the



ROUND TABLE

- patient is exposed to the drug. The IAFF reports that cancer is now the leading cause of death for fire fighters nationwide.
- 2018:
 - The IAFF holds a one-day [Cancer Summit](https://client.prod.iaff.org/#page=Toolkit_cancer_summit) featuring subject matter experts who address an array of topics on cancer in the fire service.
 - https://client.prod.iaff.org/#page=Toolkit_cancer_summit
 - The Alberta, Canada, government adds occupational disease coverage for ovarian and cervical cancer for fire fighters in the province while reducing the number of years required on the job to qualify for testicular cancer coverage from 20 to 10.
 - Florida Governor Rick Scott signs SB 376, legislation that provides expanded workers' compensation benefits to Florida fire fighters, EMTs and police officers diagnosed with post-traumatic stress linked to the job. The legislation is sponsored by state Representative Matt Willhite, an active fire fighter and member of Palm Beach County, FL Local 2928.
 - The Tennessee General Assembly passes the Tennessee Public Safety Behavioral Health Act giving fire fighters and first responders a minimum of 10 visits to a licensed mental health provider for counseling for post-traumatic stress as part of their benefits package.
 - Fire fighters and other first responders in British Columbia win presumptive coverage for post-traumatic stress as an occupational illness.
 - 2019:
 - Fire fighters and other first responders in Idaho win presumptive coverage for post-traumatic stress as an occupational illness.