



NATIONAL WILDFIRE COORDINATING GROUP

National Interagency Fire Center
3833 S. Development Avenue
Boise, Idaho 83705

MEMORANDUM

To: NWCG Members

From: Kirk Rowdabaugh, NWCG Chair

Date: March 22, 2006

Subject: Vitamin and Mineral Supplementation for Wildland Firefighters

On June 18, 2004, the IBPWT corresponded with the Safety & Health Working Team (SHWT) regarding the establishment of Medical Supply Standards to address the issue of the Medical Unit handing out minerals, vitamins, and other supplements. Specifically, the IBPWT wanted to know where the SHWT stood with the development of a specific list of over-the-counter (OTC) vitamin and mineral supplements that can be dispensed as it relates to the issue of liability, proper nutrition, and fatigue management for firefighters and support personnel on an incident. The other side of this issue is whether it is appropriate to procure OTCs.

It has become common practice for the Medical Unit to purchase and issue multivitamins and/or Vitamin C on an incident. Last fire season, the question was raised by several groups as to whether we should procure OTCs and what, if any, the liability would be if we continued to administer them. In September of 2004, the IBPWT at their quarterly meeting discussed this issue from the incident business perspective. It was determined that there was not sufficient information at that point to make a business recommendation. Therefore, the IBPWT felt a recommendation was needed from the SHWT. The SHWT referred the question to their Emergency Medical Support Group (EMSG).

On June 1, 2005, the SHWT wrote back to the IBPWT with their findings and recommendation (see attachment). In summary, a subcommittee was appointed by the EMSG, consisting of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) from academia and the Missoula Technology Development Center. Based upon their review of ongoing nutritional work and that of the scientific community, it was concluded that vitamin and mineral supplements are not recommended to prevent or reduce the risk of disease. Such supplements are not a substitute for a balanced and nutritious diet.

Based upon the current scientific information regarding micronutrient needs, the NWCG recommends that the procurement and dispensing of OTC vitamin and mineral supplements not be authorized for the interagency wildland firefighting community. The IBPWT will

transmit to the interagency community a supplement to the Interagency Incident Business Management Handbook with this guidance.

Attachment: SHWT Memo Received 6/22/2005

cc: Chair, SHWT
Chair, IBPWT



Safety and Health Working Team

June 1, 2005

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chair, IBPWT

FROM: Chair, SHWT

SUBJECT: Vitamin and Mineral Supplementation for Wildland Firefighters

The IBPWT asked the SHWT for an opinion as to the appropriateness of vitamins and mineral supplements being provided by and to incident personnel. Apparently, it has become a practice to issue multivitamins and/or vitamin C on an incident. Consequently, the question was raised should an incident provide vitamins or supplements.

The SHWT referred the question to the Emergency Medical Support Group (EMSG). The EMSG chair appointed a subcommittee consisting of the EMSG technical representative (Dr. David Cone, Yale University); also, MTDC representatives (Dr. Brian Sharkey and Carla Cox, University of Montana) to explore the question.

This group was selected because of their expertise and background. Both Sharkey and Cox are well known to the wildland community for their extensive research into various health and fitness topics in conjunction with MTDC and the University of Montana Human Performance Laboratory. Dr. Cone, the EMSG technical representative, is an emergency room physician with Yale University and himself a volunteer firefighter.

The EMSG subgroup based their recommendations on extensive and on-going review of scientific literature, and recommendations from:

- American Dietetic Association
- American Heart Association
- American Cancer Society
- American Academy of Family Physicians
- American College of Sports Medicine
- US Preventative Services Task Force
- Heart Outcomes Preventive Evaluation
- Mayo Clinic
- Committee on Military Research

The recommendations do not support the use of vitamins/mineral supplements. Supplements are not a substitute for a balanced and nutritious diet. In general, athletes

will not need vitamin and mineral supplements if adequate energy to maintain body weight is consumed in a variety of foods.

In summary, reputable organizations do not recommend the use of vitamins and mineral supplements to prevent or reduce the risk of disease. The increased energy and nutrient demands of wildland firefighters should be met by increasing the intake of a balanced diet based on a variety of foods, including carbohydrates and protein rich foods, five or more servings of fruits and vegetables, and several servings of whole grains daily. Firefighters who are unable or unwilling to include a wide variety of food from all the food groups, could consider a multiple vitamin and mineral supplement, not to exceed the RDI.

Further assessment of micronutrient needs of wildland firefighters was recommended by the EMSG investigators.

The EMSG and SHWT support the recommendations. However, everyone concurs that there are societal patterns and beliefs which was not address by the group and may be difficult to alter based upon the findings on the group.

Please feel free to contact me at (850) 414-9958 or maddeng@doacs.state.fl.us with any questions.

/s/ Gene Madden, Chair, SHWT

cc: Mike Long, SHWT Liaison
SHWT Members
EMSG Members