

# NIOSH ALERT

## Preventing Injuries and Deaths of Fire Fighters

### WARNING!

Fire departments must review their safety programs and emergency operating procedures; failures to establish and follow these programs and procedures are resulting in injuries and deaths of fire fighters.

Fire departments should take the following precautions to protect fire fighters from injury and death:

- Establish and implement an incident management system with written standard operating procedures for all fire fighters. The system should include a well-coordinated approach to the emergency, accountability of all fire fighters, and provisions for their overall safety at the scene of the emergency.
- Develop and implement a written respirator maintenance program for all respiratory protective equipment used by fire fighters. Establish service and maintenance procedures and rigidly enforce them to provide respirators that are dependable and are constantly evaluated, tested, and maintained.
- Establish and implement a system to account for the location and function of all companies, units, and fire fighters at the scene of an emergency.
- Employ a buddy system whenever fire fighters wear self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBAs).
- Provide personal alert safety system (PASS) devices and ensure that fire fighters activate them when they are involved in fire fighting, rescue, or other hazardous duties.
- Encourage municipalities to review and amend their elevator and life safety codes to require fire fighter control for all elevators with a total travel distance greater than 25 feet.
- Guard against heat stress and other medical emergencies at the fire scene; provide cool water supplies, rest areas, and access to emergency medical personnel.

Fire fighters should take the following steps to protect themselves from injury and death:

- Follow all established policies and procedures.

- Wear and activate your PASS device at the scene of every emergency.
- Wear the appropriate protective clothing and equipment (including your SCBA) at *all* incidents where hazardous atmospheres might be encountered.
- Check your SCBA to assure that it is in working order and has been properly maintained.
- Drink fluids frequently and be aware of signs of heat stress.

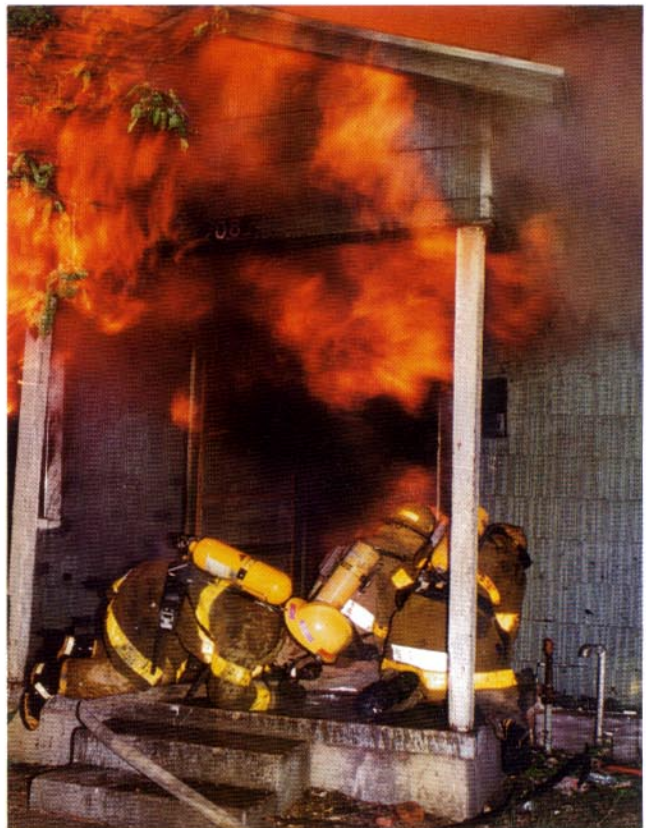


Photo by Glen E. Ellman (printed with permission)

Fire fighters in protective gear at the scene of a fire.

Call 1-800-35-NIOSH (1-800-356-4674) for additional information or for free single copies of the complete *NIOSH Alert: Request for Assistance in Preventing Injuries and Deaths of Fire Fighters* [DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 94-125].

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
Public Health Service  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health



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