

ALERT

HEART ATTACKS: LEADING CAUSE OF ON-DUTY TEXAS FIREFIGHTER DEATHS

The State Fire Marshal's Office has investigated eight line-of-duty deaths of firefighters in Texas since September 2001. These investigations have revealed some vital facts every Texas fire official needs to know:

- Heart attacks have caused five of the eight deaths and remain the leading cause of on-duty deaths among Texas fire service personnel.
- Of the **line-of-duty deaths** not caused by heart attacks, autopsies revealed two of these three firefighters had early stages of heart disease.
- Four firefighters that died of heart attacks had a history of some form of heart disease.
- Four out of the five heart attack deaths occurred during the performance of emergency duties.
- All five firefighters that died of heart attacks were less than 52 years old.

Every firefighter (paid and volunteer) and every fire officer must take the initiative in reducing the number of on-duty heart attack deaths. The State Fire Marshal recommends the following:

- Fire departments should make every reasonable effort to screen firefighters and fire officers for heart disease in an effort to reduce the number of heart attack deaths.
- Departments must encourage applicants to be forthright in disclosing medical conditions that may endanger their lives or the lives of other firefighters or civilians.
- Periodic medical examinations of firefighters should be conducted as outlined in NFPA 1582, *Standard on Medical Requirements for Fire Fighters and Information for Fire Department Physicians*.
- Fire departments should establish physical performance requirements for firefighters and fire officers and develop physical fitness programs. NFPA 1583, *Standard on Health-Related Fitness Programs for Fire Fighters* is an excellent resource.
- Fire departments should implement SOPs to address these fitness issues.

The Annual Line-of-Duty Death Report and individual investigation reports may be viewed at the State Fire Marshal web site: <http://www.tdi.state.tx.us/fire>

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First Responders at Risk

Analysis of recent firefighter line-of-duty deaths revealed that three-fourths of deaths occurred responding to, or within ten minutes of arrival on the scene.