CDC Seeks Help in Tracking Cancer Among First Responders

A voluntary registry would track cancer rates among those working in one of the most dangerous professions.

April 5, 2019 By Casey Halter

Few professions increase the risk for certain cancers more than firefighting. That's why the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is seeking public input on how to encourage more than 1 million American firefighters to participate in a new registry designed to track cancer rates among emergency responders––and to make the results public for future safety efforts, Mass Live reports.

NIOSH, a department in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, was instituted by legislation in 2018 to maintain a national voluntary registry of volunteer, retired, paid-on-call and career firefighters to monitor their cancer risk. Its planned National Firefighter Registry will build upon a five-year study published by NIOSH last year that showed that firefighters have an increased risk of digestive, lung, throat and urinary cancers.

The registry is particularly interested in recruiting population groups—including women and minorities—that had been left out of previous studies. Researchers will use the information to raise awareness about better ways to protect firefighters, including advancements in the design of firefighting equipment and practices that can lower exposure to carcinogens.

The research comes on the heels of growing research, lawsuits and advocacy on behalf of firefighters and emergency workers responding to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which exposed an estimated half a million people to toxic dust and fumes that have been linked to dozens of cancers.

To learn more about ongoing research around firefighting, cancer and 9/11, click here.

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