



# Training Brief

Quick Reference mini-training Topics

## Cultural Norms & Change

*The purpose of this training is to acknowledge the need for organizational culture change to reduce occupational cancer in the workplace and provide an overview of the levels of culture change.*

### Discussion

**Fact: Firefighters** have a **9 percent higher risk** of being diagnosed with cancer and a **14 percent higher risk** of dying from cancer than the general U.S. population, according to research by (NIOSH).

**Key Points:** Cultural norms "are the way things are done around here." Many cultural norms in the fire service serve us well:

- Junior member makes coffee.
- Firefighters wipe the Chief's rig down during station visits.
- Other cultural norms are harmful and need to be changed.
- We need to shift our perspective and actions.

Cultural norms that increase your risk of cancer:

- Wearing Dirty PPE as evidence of firefighting prowess.
- Overhauling with no SCBA
- Riding back to the station in filthy PPE, Not showering,

**Action:** Change is disruptive, hard, and requires patience:

- Not everyone will "buy-in"
- You currently possess the knowledge and tools to change your culture today.

**Make the necessary changes**

**Culture** is generally defined as the behaviors, attitudes, values, and beliefs that are shared within a group or organization.

Traditions can live long in the fire service. Over the last 30 – 40 years the fire service has experienced culture change. Most notable in the mid to late 1980's with blood borne pathogens. No longer was it considered acceptable to have blood or other bodily fluids on any exposed areas of skin. The fire service also moved to PPE to protect firefighters from disease that is caused by bloodborne pathogen. There were many firefighters contracting disease and dying from being exposed. In today's fire service we wouldn't think of touching a patient without proper PPE being worn.

We are now faced with another needed culture change in the fire service that has a profound effect on our health and safety. This culture change is deals with occupational cancer which is the leading cause of line of duty deaths in today's fire service, and the numbers are **increasing** drastically.

**Organizational culture change:** To secure buy-in and receive necessary feedback, cultural change campaigns need to be developed in collaboration with Chief Officers, Company Officer's, Labor/Management, as well as City/Government leadership:

- Change campaigns are most effective when:
  - In alignment with the leader's vision, intent.
  - Accompanied by educational/motivational materials that promote change at the cognitive and emotional level.
  - Provide the tools and equipment necessary to get the job done.

**Company level culture change:** Company Officers are the most critical pieces in a cultural change campaign:

- Company Officer's set the tone, and their crews follow:
  - Lead by example: If the boss is "on-air," wears clean PPE, and embraces a culture of safety, the crew will follow, and cultural norms will change.

**Individual crew member and culture change:** The hard science is done. The direct correlation to exposures and high rates of cancer in the fire service has been established. Several best practices have been identified for all departments to take advantage of to reduce and hopefully eliminate these exposures. The bottom line rests with each individual firefighter to take their own personal responsibility to ensure that they are taking the steps to protect themselves.