



National Volunteer Fire Council
Position Statement
Adopted 4/2017

**Support for the Education and Prevention of Diabetes in the Fire, EMS
and Rescue Services**

The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) supports and advocates for the education and prevention of diabetes and implementation of approaches to actively cope with the diagnosis for all firefighters and their families.

Problem Statement:

In the United States today, the American Diabetes Association (ADA) states that almost thirty (30) million children and adults have diabetes and another eighty-six (86) million are pre-diabetic. In addition, another 1.4 million Americans are diagnosed with the disease every year. It is the primary cause of death for over 70,000 Americans each year and a listed contributing cause for over 230,000 deaths a year. The fire service found that only three (3) percent of firefighters have been diagnosed with the disease, but the percentage of firefighters that suffered line-of-duty Coronary Heart Disease (CHD) events found that one in every five (5%) suffered from diabetes, cited in *Heart to Heart: Strategizing an Evidence-based Approach to Reduce Cardiac Disease and Death in the Fire Service* written for the National Fallen Firefighter's Foundation in December 2015.

Diabetes Mellitus is a metabolic disease characterized by the inability to use glucose (sugar) effectively due to deficiencies or resistance to insulin. It is a situation that responders deal with on a daily basis when responding to diabetic medical emergency calls. The disease contributes to a number of other diseases including heart disease, eye complications, kidney disease, neuropathy, foot problems, skin complications, and dental disease.

Each year roughly forty (40) percent of firefighters killed in the line of duty die from heart related disease. It is an issue that the NVFC and many other firefighting organizations are actively striving to improve and eventually eliminate. One of the contributing factors to heart

disease is diabetes which prompted the NVFC to assist volunteers in getting the proper diagnosis and treatment through education and by promoting annual medical evaluations. We will strive to work in partnership with other organizations to help educate firefighters and their family members in diabetes prevention and diabetes management through education and training.

Impact:

The impact of this initiative is to educate and hopefully reduce the number of cases of diabetes within the fire service. The initiative would also urge departments to provide an annual fitness evaluation to their volunteers as a complementary tool to ensure firefighter health and safety by assisting volunteers in being diagnosed if they have diabetes or other heart related diseases. This initiative builds on the NVFC Position on Firefighter Physicals, which supports annual medical assessments for all firefighters. This initiative will have the combined critical effect of enhancing public safety worker's knowledge base, improving emergency responder safety, and reduce the devastating impact of a line-of-duty death or permanent disabling injury on the families of emergency responders who are dealing with diabetes.

Submitted by: NVFC Executive Board Member and Health, Safety & Training Subcommittee Chair on Diabetes, Chief Jeff Cash, Cherryville Fire Department

Adopted by: National Volunteer Fire Council Board