



Fire Service Occupational Cancer Alliance Steering Committee Virtual Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, September 9, 2020 ♦ 11:00am

Overview

The Fire Service Occupational Cancer Alliance Steering Committee held a virtual meeting on Wednesday, September 9, 2020. The meeting was facilitated by the First Responder Center for Excellence. The following summarizes the activities of the meeting.

Attendees

Rick Best
John Brasco
Jefferey Burgess, MD, MS, MPH
Kenny Fent, Ph.D.
Joseph Finn
Bryan Frieders, MPA
Brian Geraci
Billy Goldfeder
John Granby
Casey Grant
Donald Hroma
Ed Klima
Frank Leeb
Allan Rice
Demond Simmons

Mike Wieder

NFFF
U.S. Fire Administration
University of Arizona
NIOSH
Boston Fire Department (Ret.)
FCSN
National Assoc. of State Fire Marshals
NFFF Board of Directors/IAFC
LION
Fire Protection Research Foundation
Chicago Fire Department
First Responder Center for Excellence
FDNY Deputy Chief
Formerly NAFTD
International Assoc. of Black Professional Fire Fighters/IAFC Company Officer Section
IFSTA/FPP



Welcome and Opening Remarks - Ed Klima

Ed Klima, Managing Director of the [First Responder Center for Excellence](#) welcomed everyone to the meeting, reviewed the agenda and provided a brief overview. So much of our lives are focused on COVID right now but we don't want to lose sight of the other occupational illnesses that are being worked on.

There is funding to hold an in-person Steering Committee Meeting this year however with travel restrictions that are in place that was not possible, so this meeting was held as a virtual meeting with hopes that an in-person meeting can take place before September 2021.

Strategic Scorecard Updates - Ed Klima

A strategic plan update was sent out to the committee prior to the meeting. Ed provided updates stating if you look back over the last five years there has been a lot accomplished, as well as a number of ongoing initiatives such as:

1. Identify potential steps related to research gaps and funding

- *Wildland Fire and Wildland-Urban Interface work*

A couple of objectives based on the 2019 Steering Committee meeting had to do with Wildland Fire. Development of an awareness training module for wildland firefighters is underway with an anticipated release date in early 2021.

2. Identify potential steps related to prevention efforts, including a discussion of model policies

- *Development of a physician's guide to firefighter occupational cancer*

The work on the IAFC Physicians Guide has been ongoing, funding was used to take the original guide and update it to create a version 2.0. A lot of version 2.0 will be based on providing supporting documentation to clinicians based on feedback that Sara Jahnke received from a study where she reached out to a number of clinicians, primarily primary care physicians and feedback received was that they understood the guidance but they wanted more supporting documentation.

- *Develop national criteria for inclusion in the NFFF memorial*

An advisory committee held several meetings in 2019 to look at memorial inclusion and is currently under development.



- *Enhancement of the FRCE's website to include more pictures, information and useful links to serve as a clearinghouse of information to drive users to other sites*

One of the challenges with all the information on the Everyone Goes Home website was it could be challenging to search, so all of the occupational illness resources were transferred from Everyone Goes Home to the FRCE website.

The FRCE website is supposed to be an information clearinghouse. With AFG grant funding, a firm was hired to create a really robust research to practice portal where the resources are cataloged, can be searched by key tags and can be filtered to make it easier to search for information. Currently, there are just under 200 cancer related items. The enhanced FRCE website is scheduled to launch at the end of this month.

In order to keep information relevant and archive older information that is still useful there are several commitments for funding for the next couple of years to maintain the website.

- *Expand dissemination of information from original Cancer Symposium through regional training opportunities*

The Regional Cancer Seminars were going really well in 2019/20 right before everything shut down due to COVID-19. Some attendance numbers were larger than others, but the reality is there was a lot of leadership attending and that is extremely beneficial as they can take the information back to the department level.

There were a number of seminars scheduled for this year that have been postponed, those seminars will be rescheduled with the various academies and states as soon as they are open back up for trainings. Funding is good until September 2021.

There was some discussion about holding these seminars virtually however the group feels a lot of the value in bringing the experts out is the personal interaction.

- *Look to schedule a subsequent Symposium*

Going back to the original symposium in Phoenix the thought was to hold a symposium every 3-4 years. Coming out of the 2018 Steering Committee Meeting there was discussion to do a research-based symposium which the University of Miami (UM) took the lead on last summer, but there was still the desire to hold a full symposium.



In February 2020, UM held a research symposium geared towards regional items in Florida but was billed as a National Conference. Our initial conversations with UM was that we want to go back to having the national planning committee and making sure all interests are at the table. UM wants to hold an annual symposium. The Alliance could piggyback on that every couple of years and hold a national symposium, the benefit being we can help get speakers and attendees there.

3. Identify potential steps to improve or expand presumptive legislation

- *Provide sample legislation for fire departments to use in advocacy efforts on the state level*

There wasn't a lot of movement on the state level this spring because most states that did have legislative sessions were limited in what they did. The presumptive legislation database was updated in the fall, another update will be done soon.

Fire Service Occupational Cancer Symposium Discussion

An item needing feedback is 2021, UM currently has their symposium scheduled for late February and we are currently of the belief that we're not scheduling any major in-person conferences until May 2021 because things are so dynamic and we don't want to schedule something and have to move it. UM feels if they could not do something in person, they could do something virtual. If UM is set on the February date, do we do something separate later in the year or see if they will reschedule to later in the year?

John Granby stated that with the latest feedback he feels it should be moved to summer 2021. If UM wants to do some type of webinar in February 2021 that's fine but he feels we will still be in some form of shut down in February 2021 and with all the scheduling and planning that goes into it, it would behoove us to push it out later in the year.

Bryan Frieders agreed and stated that we should also consider that Florida is doing a lot of great work but in the context of what the FRCE goals & mission are we probably need to consider diversifying some of the topics and some of the things we are doing so essentially its incorporating a lot of their work but not duplicating it. Develop a curriculum that has a little more diversification across all aspects of the fire service and not just the scientific part of it.

Casey Grant agrees that February is too early.

Ed Klima has an email in to the UM team to set up a call to discuss and then he will circle back with the committee.



Firefighter Cancer Cohort Study (FFCCS) Update – Casey Grant & Jeff Burgess

Casey Grant provided an overview of the Cohort Study stating that things have been very busy, but COVID-19 has of course affected the project. Right now, with the expansion grant, that has added some to the cohort but there is an effort to add more and the cohort is targeting 10,000 firefighters. There has also been effort to add additional grants and discussion to have a grant possibly manage some of the activities as well to allow the researchers to focus on their part of the efforts.

Jeff Burgess stated that the basic framework study has been completed, and they are working on the expansion study which includes trainers, fire cause investigators and some WUI work. Currently they are in the middle of the PFAS project that’s been held up because of analysis, the CDC/NCH laboratories have been put on hold since about March.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
1) FFCCS: Framework							
2) FFCCS: Expansion							
3) FFCCS: PFAS							
4) FFCCS: WUI							

They are hopeful they will have projects funded by FEMA for women firefighters and for volunteers with the volunteers run by Dr. Judith Graber out of New Jersey.

Jeff added that they are up around 1200 individual participants and they expect that to continue to go up despite COVID-19. COVID has changed a lot of things but they have managed to get some funding from the CDC to look at COVID-19 and firefighters so there’s continuing recruitment going on.

Really exciting is the community engaged work, and one of the examples is the Wildland Urban Interface work and because of our inability to travel the firefighters have taken much more control of things. Derick Irwin an engineer with LA County, has been recruiting individuals for the study and also collecting urine after a lot of WUI events. He recruited hundreds of individuals from LA County then following up with Orange County Fire Authority.

Jeff feels they are still moving forward and there is some good research coming out. One of the things they’ve just been finding out, that hasn’t been published yet but they are finding some differences in the epigenetic markers between Hispanic firefighters and non-Hispanic firefighters and they feel some of the things they are finding might help explain why at least in one large CA study the minority firefighters (2/3 Hispanic & 1/3 Black) have six cancers that the non-minority firefighters don’t. Jeff believes they are slowly helping to identify some reasons for this that will hopefully lead towards prevention efforts in the future.

Frank Leeb stated there were several hurdles to overcome. These are long-term projects and if there isn’t long-term sustainable buy in from the stakeholders in the individual departments, there is no one entity that is going to be able to easily manage 10,000



participants over a thirty-year period because it spans several careers. The person who would be the FDNY contact person is likely going to have changed several times over thirty years so how do you build the mechanism to where you continually have the buy ins to these studies that are sustainable over the long-term, both in buy-in from the department and the financial buy-in.

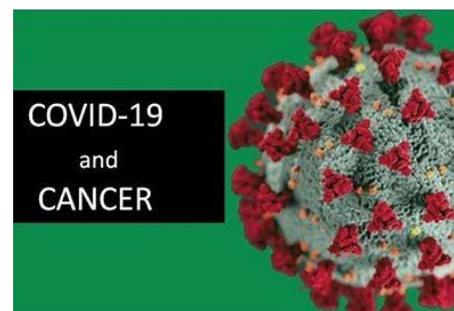
Casey Grant added that they have been having discussions on trying to re-focus some of the funding mechanisms and really trying to provide what is needed in terms of managing this thirty-year project over multiple careers. Being able to clarify some of the funding as it comes in, in support of what the researchers need versus funding for just managing the project.

Jeff Burgess stated while they have challenges, they are making very positive contributions at the same time. The longer it goes and the larger it gets the more impactful this study can be. They've already had some very significant wins from the study, some of the research associated with this that was associated just with Tucson but now is expanding to the other departments that are involved, is actually supporting having IARC re-visit firefighting and its relation to cancer. Doug Daniels, the first author of the big NIOSH 3 City Study with Philadelphia, Chicago and San Francisco is on the committee that recommends to IARC what to review. It was some of the data about the epigenetic changes being mechanisms of going from exposure to actual cancer that they used to recommend to IARC to revisit it. IARC will be revisiting this in the next couple of years and the information that will continue to be collected will help just that alone moving us from possible to probable or known human carcinogens and that will help the presumptive cancer laws tremendously let alone our opportunities for prevention with some of the markers where we can see changes from exposures prior to the development of cancer. Really powerful in allowing us to have opportunities of seeing how our interventions we are putting into place now can help reverse that increased risk of cancer before it happens.

Ed Klima stated that there is space allocated in Firehouse Magazine Nov/Dec issue for a Cancer Cohort Study article.

How COVID-19 has affected those involved in cancer research – Jeff Burgess

Jeff provided some oversight on how COVID-19 has affected those involved in cancer research, stating it's a little ironic given that a number of states including Arizona and Florida have had some of the highest rates and their states and universities won't allow travel out of the state for anything business related and if they do go out, they have to quarantine for fourteen days when they return. Because of that, they are having to look at and the LA County and Orange County Fire Authority is a good example for the firefighters to be doing some of their own work. Having the firefighters more involved in deciding of all stages of this study is really positive and Jeff feels the travel





restrictions are pushing them towards where they want to be with the firefighters and departments having more control of what they want to do, getting people involved and answering questions that they care about.

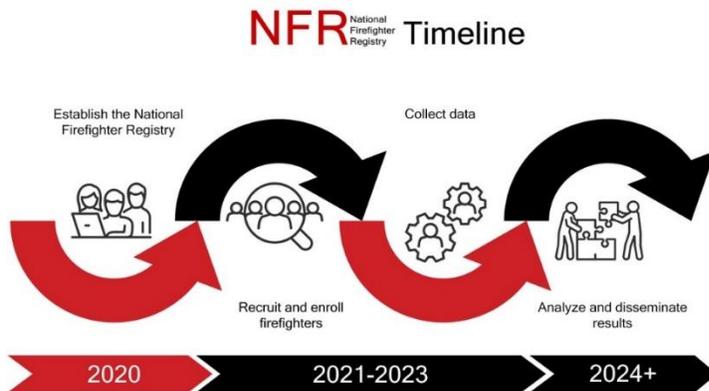
Casey Grant added that the jury is still out, and time will tell but there is a question of long-term health impacts of COVID-19 in terms of susceptibility to other long-term issues they are trying to address.

Jeff Burgess conveyed they have some funding and anticipate additional funding, so they are looking at the relationships between PFAS exposure (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) like the forever chemicals. They are in aqueous film-forming foams (AFFF), they are in firefighter gear although they do not know the extent into which they get out of the gear and into the firefighters. They have reason to believe that higher levels of PFAS may make you more susceptible to COVID-19 because it will reduce your ability to mount an effective immune response.

National Cancer Registry Update – Kenneth Fent



Kenny Fent provided an update on the National Cancer Registry. The registry is being developed due to legislation of the Firefighter Cancer Registry Act of 2018.



The goal of the registry is to better understand and track firefighters cancer risk over time and over the career so the link between workplace exposures and cancer can be better understood. They want the registry to be inclusive of all firefighters, it's not just for firefighters who have received a cancer diagnosis. It is an exposure registry, so they encourage anyone who has ever been a firefighter to join and are especially interested in minority, female and

volunteer firefighters. These are groups that are specifically called out in the Firefighter Cancer Registry Act but are also interested in all the sub-specialties of the fire service including instructors, wildland firefighters and fire investigators.

The goal is to enroll 200,000 firefighters over the next 2-3 years. They are looking at two ways to recruit firefighters (1) open enrollment where any firefighter in the country can go to a secure website and register themselves and (2) targeted enrollment, working directly with fire departments to enroll their members.

In terms of progress they have made a lot of progress. They are required to obtain guidance from a variety of stakeholders, which is the NFR sub-committee and that's a sub-committee of



the NIOSH Board of Scientific Counselors and comprised of 13 members from the fire service or researchers. They have reviewed the protocol enrollment questionnaire and consent form and published a report with recommendations. That report is being reviewed now and changes are being made based on the feedback. Within the next few weeks, the protocol consent form and enrollment questionnaire will be finalized to get the final review and approval at CDC. Then the enrollment questionnaire will be submitted to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), they have to give the final approval on the questionnaire and that process takes approximately 3-4 months. That is one of the biggest things that has to happen before the registry can be launched.

Additionally, an Assurance of Confidentiality which is the highest level of protection for identifiable data is soon to be submitted for final approval. A registration web portal prototype has been created and they are in the process of working on the final version, expecting it to be completed by early 2021. Focus group sessions have been held with a variety of firefighters to better understand barriers and how to communicate with different firefighters. The goal is to launch the registry in April 2021 and coincide with FDIC, but a lot of things have to line up in order for that to happen, that would be primarily for the open enrollment (the web portal).

They are looking for spokespersons for the registry. If you know anyone highly respected, a good speaker who might be willing to lend some support to the registry. Looking for 8-9 people and currently have 3-4.

Organizational Updates

Brian Geraci/[National Association of State Fire Marshals](#) - The National Association of State Fire Marshals held elections this year. They are meeting virtually every month with all the fire marshals across the country. The biggest issues right now are schools and COVID and getting everybody back in and what they are going to do about social distancing and fire drills.

Don Hroma/[Chicago Fire Department](#) - Have had good changes with Mayor and fire commissioner. Their local has made really good progress, they just signed in their contract for a second set of bunker gear. Making good strides in prevention, they just came up with a new decon procedure for decon and on the scene of emergencies, weather permitting and using the wipes.

Mike Wieder/[IFSTA/FPP](#) - Had to change the way they are doing things. Believes fire departments are still promoting and training because they haven't seen a decline in their sales. Since their inception in 1934, July 2020 was the first time they had to cancel a conference and hold the meetings electronically. They have a secondary meeting every January and Mike expects that will be virtual as well because he doesn't think there will be a resolution in time to allow them to fly everyone to Tulsa.



Rick Best/NFFF - The NFFF is moving along, just having to find different ways to do things. They are exploring a few different things through Cvent, such as virtual meetings. They are working towards holding the technology symposium virtual in the spring. It's not the same but trying to do it and keep people in the training mind.

Billy Goldfeder/IAFC – IAFC continues to look at and have interest in the facts related to the PFOA issue and bunker gear. Their message is still very strong, do not stop wearing your gear when it's needed but don't wear it if it's not needed and they are taking a very logical/practical approach. The IAFC invited all the manufacturers of bunker gear to a meeting last fall and had a 35% turn out. They are hoping to meet again in the next couple of weeks virtually. They understand that like with many issues involving health and safety there is the emotional aspect but there's also the factual aspect, as most of us know we can get emotional over something or we can get factual over something. Bottomline is you should not be wearing your gear around the firehouse or to the grocery store. We are trying to take the practical approach avoiding the emotional cries until we get some facts and then in the future work with the manufacturers so they can produce gear that is perhaps even safer. We don't want a situation where people start ignoring NFPA or a manufacturer decides they want to start making something new that's not been approved, and we certainly don't want firefighters doing things such as cutting out their inner liner. Billy is personally convinced the biggest issues are the ones the alliance is facing such as, not wearing gear, not wearing masks, not going to physicals, not getting check-ups vs. the potential that our bunker gear may be providing us with a cancer related problem such as PFAS, PFOA, etc.

John Granby/LION - John is thrilled that the alliance is looking at fact based PFOA issues. Totally agrees it would be great to have facts rather than hysteria about all the different issues that seem to get blown out of proportion. Educating firefighters is probably the key issue to know what they should do and should not do and keeping their gear clean and getting it decontaminated. The health and wellness of the fire service is critical, so he is also happy that we have included PFOAS into some of the studies.

Joe Finn/Boston Fire Department – Takenosmoke.org video series released two additional videos around recruits and about the cardiac issues firefighters face. BFD is in the middle of a strategic initiative with Mass General Hospital, they are going to commit significant research funds to them and make available their clinical diagnostic people around cancer/cancer research. Mass General Hospital embraced BFD's full body scan, which is funded through some philanthropy. They had a criterion where members over 50 with 20 years' service could get a full body scan at no cost to them and they were able to detect a lot of early stage cancers and a lot of cardiac events. Literally members went from the body scan to the operating table in several cases, to repair aortic aneurysms, quadruple & triple bypass surgeries. A lot of good things underway and some transitions going on at Boston Fire Department, Commissioner Jack Dempsey took over. Unfortunately, they have been inundated with COVID and trying to keep everyone healthy but Joe is enthusiastic that once we get out of COVID the relationship with Mass General will be on the forefront and more of their initiatives will be implemented.



Jefferey Burgess/[University of Arizona](#) – Joe Finn has really been a leader in this. The partnership with the local cancer centers is exactly what needs to be done. Jeff proposes as an agenda item for future projects, is to be collecting information from other sites/departments that are also doing these more advanced screening procedures to collect the information together. One he would add is Vincere Cancer Center, they are being funded by the Phoenix Fire Department and are also doing full body MRI. Both places are doing more than most departments so if we can be collecting information on what they are finding, how frequently they are finding it and how old the firefighters are and putting that information together he thinks would help a lot in determining what screening mechanisms we should do because right now there's the basic stuff for the general population that is clearly not applicable for firefighters and then there's a lack of information on what we are finding. What the consequences are of finding something like a lung nodule. There are lots of different questions, but Jeff thinks if the alliance can put together a group collecting this information it would be incredibly helpful.

Allan Rice/[NAFTD](#) – North American Fire Training Directors have had a couple of exciting developments over the last few months. Chief Ken Willette, formerly with NFPA was hired on as NAFTD first Executive Director. Going to see a lot of great things out of NAFTD, moving from an all-volunteer structure to having a paid professional Executive Director. Continuing to work a very robust strategic plan which will really change the face and impact of the organization.

New superintendent for the National fire Academy, Eriks Gabliks. Eriks is a past president of NAFTD and currently wrapping up his tenure as the State of Oregon Director of Public Safety Training and will be in route to Emmitsburg in the next few weeks. We will have a great advocate at NFA and within USFA.

Casey Grant/[FPRF](#) – Casey assisted the Fire Protection Research Foundation and submitted for a small grant for next year to address the PFAS issue (PFAS, PFOA). Specifically, this was to repeat what is referred to as the Dallas Meetings, held at the Dallas airport. They have addressed the issue of PFAS in foams and this has been heavily driven by the industrial users as well as the municipal in the traditional fire service as we know it. What it's done is pulled in some of the other key groups most notably the Department of Defense, the environmental folks and others. The FPRF's role in this is trying to identify other foams that can be used, especially in the fixed systems never mind for the manual applications because the replacements are needed. The industrial fire brigades such as with the oil companies they desperately want to see these foams moved forward but there's a huge problem with the replacements, as we talk about the long chain and short chain replacements and the non-fluorinated foams and so forth, they all have different design perimeters, they don't work with the same hardware especially in the fixed systems and there are issues of cross contamination. So there are a lot of questions and the bottom line is and where the Dallas meeting has been helpful is fire departments just want to replace this stuff but you still have to put out a class B fire, you still need foam because you have to be able to extinguish flammable liquid fires. They really wanted to make sure this higher-level meeting gets



repeated and it looks like there have been questions from AFG and that there is funding to do this in late 2021.

John Brasko/USFA – USFA has been shut down. Keeping things moving ahead as far as contracts and supporting the various work they do with NIOSH and some of the other research organizations.

Demond Simmons/International Association of Black Professional Fire Fighters/IAFC Company Officer Section – They have a working group working on various cancer initiatives from an information/education perspective.

Ed Klima/FRCE – Ed wanted to mention the decontamination standard in the scorecard, that is an objective that the NFPA has a committee working on, when the first draft comes out for comment Ed encourages everyone to look at it. The next NFPA committee meeting is October 21-22, 2020.

Closing

In closing, Ed stated, moving forward messaging to the fire Service and reminding them of these various topics will be key.

The meeting concluded at 12:10.