PREGNANCY AND RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH FIREFIGHTING

NUMBER: 207
CATEGORY: Personnel
EFFECTIVE: DATE: 12/01/03
AUTHOR: Judy Murphy

REFERENCE
Central Pierce Fire & Rescue

SCOPE
All personnel.

PURPOSE
To inform employees and their physicians of the risks associated with firefighting while pregnant.

POLICY

Pregnancies in the fire service shall be treated no differently than any other medical condition that may inhibit a firefighter’s ability to perform the job assignment. It is the policy of Central Pierce Fire & Rescue to provide equal employment opportunities to all members, paid and volunteer; therefore, this policy establishes guidelines for the pregnant firefighter in the performance of assigned duties, while being mindful of personnel safety.

Routinely, firefighters may encounter hazards in the daily performance of their jobs that can also be considered a reproductive risk, such as but not limited to: exposures to excessive heat, toxic chemicals & smoke, infectious disease, diesel fumes, insufficient oxygen environments, and the lifting/carrying of heavy objects.

Much has been documented suggesting the risks of by-products of fires, including carbon monoxide, hydrogen cyanide, acrolein, formaldehyde, benzene, acetaldehyde and formic acids. Asymptomatic exposures to the mother don't guarantee zero risk to the developing fetus; therefore, the department desires to work with the employee and their personal physician to minimize unnecessary risks.

Discrimination on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions constitutes unlawful sex discrimination and will not be tolerated. By law, the decision of work assignment status will be determined by the pregnant employee and her physician.

PROCEDURE
1. Upon confirmation of pregnancy, the firefighter shall contact the Fire Chief or Human Resource Manager informing them of expected date of delivery, personal physician’s name & contact information.

2. The firefighter shall submit a department’s written form indicating, “fit for full duty” without restrictions signed by her physician. The Human Resource Manager will ensure that the employee’s physician has the appropriate job description for the member to assess the risk of any exposures.

3. The department will offer consultation with their Occupational Medicine Physician regarding the risks related to the assignment, when requested by the employee or her physician.

4. The critical nature of the emergency incident makes it crucial that each member is able to perform the full range of essential job functions for their position; however, safety will be the primary concern, and considerations may be made to further reduce the risks for the pregnant firefighter, when possible. This may include but not restricted to: overhaul in complete PPE with SCBA, extended rehabilitation times for overheated environments, not working in a space with restricted ventilation or diesel fumes.

5. At any time, upon request of the pregnant firefighter or their physician, the Fire District will immediately re-assign them to light duty, when available.

6. Sick leave needed for the pregnancy shall be the same as those for any other medical condition. Contact Human Resources for guidance in special circumstances.

7. Upon termination of the pregnancy or following childbirth, the firefighter shall submit a Release to Duty form signed by her physician releasing her to full firefighting duty with no restrictions to Human Resources. Training and Operations shall be notified to schedule any requirements that must be completed prior to returning to the employee’s permanently assigned position.

8. Pregnant volunteer firefighters have the option of requesting an assignment in Support Services or a temporary leave of absence in lieu of light duty.
ATTACHMENTS
Pregnancy Job Responsibilities Form

PREGNANCY JOB RESPONSIBILITIES FORM

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JOB PERFORMANCE RISKS

Listed below are routine fire ground and emergency medical service delivery duties which all members are subject to performing. While this list is not exhaustive, it does include typical duties. These duties are performed in all weather conditions, including extremes of heat, cold and precipitation. Fire ground activities are performed while wearing approximately 50 pounds of required protective clothing, including self-contained breathing apparatus. Fire ground activities typically last from 30 minutes to several hours.

1. Lifting a variety of equipment. One person’s share of the weight load could be 35 – 40 pounds, however, it is not uncommon for a firefighter to have to carry equipment weighing 65 pounds or more. This is in addition to 50 pounds of protective clothing.
2. Climbing ladders while lifting/carrying a hose line, another ladder, or other equipment weighing 30 – 40 pounds.
3. Wielding an ax, shoveling burned debris, moving furniture, bending, twisting, pushing and pulling, frequently in awkward positions.
4. Assisting another firefighter in pulling 200 feet of water filled hose. Weight of hose and water will be approximately 360 pounds.
5. Upward thrusting of “pike poles” into ceilings to open an access to attic spaces.
6. Crawling through and performing tasks in confined spaces.
7. Walking on roofs and other often wet surfaces where footing is precarious. Walking in smoke-filled rooms with very limited visibility while carrying equipment and/or performing emergency tasks.
8. Climbing several flights of stairs carrying hose, rescue saws, ladders, other equipment weighing as much as 65 – 75 pounds.
9. Frequent exposure to excessive heat during fire related operations. As these operations are in a moisture-filled atmosphere, higher temperatures may be generated. In these excessively hot environments, core body temperature can elevate to over 101°F.
10. Lifting patients under emergency response conditions. Patient weight is generally 200 pounds, but weights up to 400 pounds are not uncommon. While additional personnel are usually available to assist with particularly heavy patients, the confined spaces in which the lifting may occur puts may put an additional burden.
11. Frequent exposure to communicable diseases through airborne or bloodborne routes of transmission. Personal protective equipment, including gloves, eye protection and masks are required by the department on EMS calls.
A firefighter/EMS provider is a member of an emergency response team and it is imperative that each member of the team be capable of effective job performance. At both fire and medical emergencies the unrestricted performance of each member may be necessary to perform life saving activities in which seconds are critical. A member should not be released to full duty if there would be any restrictions placed on performing any of the listed duties.

If you have any questions related to these job responsibilities and your patient's ability to fulfill these functions, Central Pierce Fire & Rescue Occupational Medicine Provider, Franciscan Occupational Health, will be available for consultation or patient evaluation. They may be reached at 253-274-5503.

As physician of ____________________________ (patient's name)

I acknowledge and understand the contents of the Firefighter Performance Risk.

_________________________________________  _______________________________________
Physician Name                  Physician signature

Office Phone:_____________________     Date:_______________________