

Phoenix 2004

Seven members of Woodinville Fire and Life Safety went to Phoenix for the 16th Annual Health and Safety Symposium. Six of the seven are PEER fitness trainers and the seventh is the Lieutenant for the team. This trip gave the team a great chance to communicate with each other and to network with other departments around the country about wellness in the fire service.

Many factors influence the wellness of firefighters. It is common knowledge that firefighters have high incidence for injuries and death while on duty. It is also proven that long-term exposure to stress significantly decreases lymphocytes (cells that battle illness), firefighters have doubled the normal population for some forms of cancer, and in Washington State it has been studied and stated that firefighters life expectancy is eight to nine years less than that of the normal population. Bottom line; the job of a firefighter is very hard on the human body and in many cases diseases occur.

Since there is such a detrimental impact on the firefighters body and spirit directly related to the job it has been recommended that the fire department start a wellness program to combat these effects. We can do many things to help the firefighter balance out some of those negative effects.

Some of the negative factors are high levels of stress and interrupted sleep. Stress dumps bad chemicals in the body. Deep sleep and exercise will balance those bad chemicals. If those chemicals are allowed to accumulate it will eventually lead to vascular disease and other occupational diseases.

The Phoenix Symposium has been a tremendous motivational tool. Several of us on the trip took the opportunity to climb the local hills for our morning and afternoon workouts. Others of us spent many hours networking with other department members on ideas of how to improve our department. Some of the topics at the symposium were geared around living a healthy lifestyle; some were making us aware of more of the issues. We came home with many resources.

The goal of the wellness team is to combat all the negative effects from our job. We want all of our firefighters to leave this job healthy and to live a long and healthy retirement. To do this it will take much effort and work. On a daily basis we must eat nutritiously and drink lots of water. We must exercise and get deep sleep to balance the bad chemicals from our job.

If we succeed we will have a happy and healthy work force, one that will be healthier, have less injuries, and one that is more productive at work. We can have a career in the fire service that does not kill 50 firefighters a year at work, and send hundreds home on disabilities annually.

Knowledge is power and now it's time to spread the knowledge and motivation.

Sincerely,
Firefighter Peter Briner

31 C-Shift

C-shift PEER Fitness Trainer