

## World Fire Congress Communities of Practice

### Topic Abstracts — 2026 London Congress

#### 6. Firefighter Health and Safety

The people who serve in fire and rescue services face occupational health risks that are among the most serious of any profession — yet the nature and severity of those risks vary significantly across the globe, and the research, policy, and cultural responses have been deeply uneven. In higher-income nations, occupational cancer has emerged as the leading cause of line-of-duty death, with approximately 75% of IAFF line-of-duty deaths in 2024 attributed to cancer, driven by toxic combustion byproduct exposure and chemical contamination in PPE. Thermal stress, emotional stress, and occupational injuries are recorded across fire services globally, and the relationship between depression, PTSD, and excess alcohol consumption in firefighters is well established as a compounding factor in workplace accidents and long-term health deterioration. In many parts of the world, however, the most pressing health and safety concerns are more foundational: lack of basic personal protective equipment, extreme heat conditions without adequate rehabilitation protocols, road crash risk during emergency response, infectious disease exposure, and the absence of any formal occupational health monitoring system. The importance of international cooperation in safeguarding first responders and the communities they serve has been underscored at the highest levels of the WFC. This Community of Practice brings together the full spectrum of global fire service experience to build shared knowledge, compare evidence-based interventions, and advocate for a universal standard of care — because the protection of those who protect others should not depend on the country in which they serve. [IFSJ](#) [NIH](#)