



Event Type: Safety Discussion from the Fireline

Date: August 4, 2014

Location: On the Fire Line in WA and OR

Rapid Lesson Sharing

If You Are Just Relying on Hydration, You Are Already in Trouble

Heat related injuries and illnesses: A Conversation with a Safety Officer

Good News and Bad News

Are you feeling bombarded with information about Heat Related Injuries and Illnesses? There has been a lot of information in camps, morning briefings, debriefings, etc. where they are working hard to get all this information to boots on the ground. The Good News is Safety Officers on fires are reporting that crew supervisors are doing a great job of focusing on hydration while on assignments.

The Bad News is it seems firefighters are focused on water consumption and less on nutrition and calories. Additionally, it has been observed some firefighters may be trying to lose weight during fire season by cutting their food intake and not staying up with proper nutrition and/or diet. [Without proper nutrition](#), hydration only goes so far to prevent heat related injuries and illnesses. The final piece to the puzzle is your physical fitness. Physical fitness is critical in helping the body cope with the heat, long shifts and lack of proper nutrition while on assignments.

“What is up with frozen burritos and chicken chimichangas in fire lunches?”

~overheard on a large fire

Points to Ponder

- Physical Fitness. Nutrition. Hydration. These are not exclusively assigned to personnel who are in full time firefighter positions. This message is also for firefighters across the nation who have other duties to perform while not on a fire assignment. A few days sitting in an air conditioned office can get you behind the hydration curve. *What do YOU do to stay in fire line shape?*
- You may take days off but your body does not. It is important for firefighters to make an extra effort to maintain good nutrition and hydration even on days off. This effort will ensure the body's hydration and nutrition levels are not behind the curveball when you get your next assignment. *What do YOU feed your body on days off?*
- [Two More Chains](#) has just released its Summer edition. It is about Physical Fitness. We challenge all of you to read it and talk about it with others. *What do YOU think?*
- A physical training program isn't just during fire season. *What do YOU do in the off season to prepare and condition your body?*

“Great!!! Another (explicit word edited) red, plastic, cheap ass apple!!! How many days in a row are we going to get apples?”

~ Division Supervisor

"Really need a Nutritionist to look at all the meals served to firefighter, this stuff has very little nutritional value for what they are doing out there. The national contract needs to be rewritten." ~Food Unit Leader

- While your morning energy drink (or 2 or 3) might give you quick physical response, it is recommended to avoid them. Honestly, we just don't fully understand the effects of the mixture of ingredients in energy drinks and energy supplements on the firefighter. There have been some studies that have

linked some of the ingredients to short term heart problems such as [increased heart rates and decreased function of the left ventricle](#). *How many energy drinks do YOU drink?*

- Cool nights and hot days can really mess with your body. It can lead to disruption in your hydration intake. *What is YOUR method of staying hydrated?*
- Which would you rather do right before hiking up the fire line or constructing line: eat a big gut bomb of a meal or grab a quick bite to eat? Small, frequent snacks have been shown to combat heat related illness and dehydration. Your body needs calories (i.e. fuel) to operate its cooling mechanisms. *What do YOU prefer to eat when engaged in arduous activities?*

"It's not the quantity; it's the quality of the food that counts" ~ Crew Boss

A Communication to Our Organizations – Practice What We Preach

- We cannot continue to ask firefighters to maintain proper nutrition, hydration and fitness but continue to provide them with poor nutrition needed to perform at high levels expected on the fire line. A look into the National Food Service Contract needs to be conducted in addition to field checks. The provided food on the fire line is nutritionally poor at best. This issue has been discussed and complained about by firefighters at the ground level for several years. Concerns have been pushed up the chain of command but the "fire lunch" has gone unchanged.

"I took two bites of the sandwich, wrapped it back up and put it in my pack. The nasty thing was not worth the effort to chew"

~ Firefighter Type 2

Helpful Links

- http://www.nifc.gov/PUBLICATIONS/hotshot_standards/IHC_Standards.pdf
- <http://www.nwcg.gov/pms/pubs/pms304-2.pdf>

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