

February 13, 2009

The Health, Safety and Education Committee is currently investigating a reported positive test for antimony exposure of at least one member of the NJFMBA. This issue has been recently reported on a variety of fire service websites. We have been in contact with the CDC, NIOSH and EOSHI regarding this issue, and we are currently researching the issue.

The reported exposure is similar to the incident currently being investigated by the CDC. The CDC is attempting to determine the source of the antimony exposure of several Boca Raton firefighters. The Boca Raton FD and the local involved with this incident utilize Fechheimer Brothers/Flying Cross work station uniforms.

We have suggested that the particular member cease using the work station uniforms until the source of his exposure is determined. In addition, we have made other recommendations including seeking medical evaluation. The CDC recommends that urine analysis is the preferred method for determining antimony levels.

Antimony is found in the FR material of the above mentioned uniforms, it is not applied as a spray to the garment after construction. The method of exposure thought to be through absorption through the skin. It may be the result of garment degradation. According to the CDC long term exposure to antimony can result in eye irritation, lung problems, stomach pain, diarrhea, vomiting, ulcers and other ailments. Boca Raton firefighters have reported a variety of health issues over the years, including cancer, numbness and tingling in their hands and feet, headaches and rashes. The desired manner of determining exposure is through urine analysis.

According OSHA potential symptoms of antimony exposure include the following: Eye, skin, nose, throat, mouth irritation; ulceration of nasal septum and larynx; dermatitis (antimony spots); cough; dizziness; seizures; headache; anorexia, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea; stomach cramps; insomnia; inability to smell properly; cardiovascular disturbances; pulmonary edema, pharyngitis, tracheitis, pneumoconiosis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; INGES ACUTE: Metallic taste; abdominal pain; burning sensation; bloody stools; slow shallow respiration, coma and death.

We have been able to determine through our conversations with the CDC and through available information from various EHS sources that the potential for secondary exposure to our family members is minimal. However, this issue underscores the importance of proper decontamination procedures for our turnout gear and our workstation uniforms. All members are being directed to launder their uniforms after each wearing. Additionally, these uniforms are to be laundered separately.

It must be noted that this is a preliminary report and we are working with the local and the district VP on this issue. As more information becomes available we will inform our membership.

Anyone with questions related to this issue or any other issue can contact the Health, Safety and Education Committee at 732-499-7250 or at safety@njfmba.org

Stay Safe and Stay Well,
Paul C. Kearns Jr.
Health, Safety and Education Chairman
New Jersey Firefighters Mutual Benevolent Association