



FIRE DEPARTMENT • CITY OF NEW YORK

Department Order No. 74

June 12, 2023

Edited Online Edition



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MESSAGE FROM THE FIRE COMMISSIONER

June is National Cancer Survivor Month. As a leading cause of deaths in the fire service, it is critical we come together as a department to screen, prevent, and treat cancer in our membership. As the largest department in the country, we are the model for other departments. We also know we carry an even greater risk as so many of our members were exposed to cancer-causing toxins during their service on 9/11 and in the rescue and recovery effort.

We know screening and prevention can make a difference even in a population with elevated risk. As a result, we will be rolling out programs over the course of this month and the rest of the summer to increasing screening, prevention, and treatment for our members.

It's important to note that most of us, and from my observation especially those in the fire service who are accustomed to taking care of others, don't put themselves first when it comes to screening and prevention. Rising rates of cancer in our membership compel us to think differently about prevention and treatment.

The number of post 9/11 deaths is approaching and will soon eclipse the 343 members we lost on 9/11, and most of those deaths are from cancer. Cancer is the leading cause of death among firefighters, and that risk is increasing as what burns has become more toxic.

I can speak to the reluctance myself to get screened, for all the reasons we avoid this: It's time consuming, it's uncomfortable, and it's easier to think it will never happen to us. But I recently took the time to get some long-delayed screenings. They weren't fun. It was hard to take the time off work. The procedures were uncomfortable. After an initial mammogram found abnormal results, I had to undergo additional screenings and a biopsy. Weeks of uncertainty about the outcome certainly isn't what anyone wishes to go through. But it emphasizes why this is so important – health is a precious resource we shouldn't take for granted. I was lucky enough to get good news at the end of my screening, but the process has committed me to prioritizing my regular screenings. I hope to encourage my FDNY family to do the same.

In the upcoming weeks you'll see and hear additional stories from members whose early screening has kept them healthy, or early detection ensured they caught their cancer early and are now cancer free.

You'll hear about additional measures we're taking to ensure less exposure to contamination and carcinogens.

And you'll hear about the measures we're taking to secure resources for our members who are sick, and their families.

We need to prioritize our health and wellness. If not for our sake, then for those in our lives who depend on us, and in memory of those we have already lost. Chief Ron Spadafora wrote a final letter to the membership, and encouraged them to take prevention seriously, and embrace decontaminating their gear after fires. "I thought I was invincible, but I was wrong," he wrote. We owe it to him and so many others to heed these warnings and encourage one another to do all we can to remain healthy, in an already dangerous profession. In doing so, we will set an example for the fire service, and most importantly, ensure we can create more time and memories with those we love.

By Order of: **Laura Kavanagh**, *Fire Commissioner*
John J. Hodgens, *Chief of Department*