

2026 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY

Workers' Compensation Coverage

The VPFF urges the Virginia General Assembly to protect firefighters and their families by increasing cancer coverage in the Workers' Compensation Act.

Background:

Occupational cancer is the number one cause of death among firefighters. From repeated exposure to carcinogenic materials released while fighting fires, to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) which are embedded in firefighting gear, firefighters have a nine percent higher risk of being diagnosed with cancer and a fourteen percent higher risk of dying from cancer than the general public. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has classified the profession of firefighting as a Group I carcinogenic, ranking it as high as unprotected exposure to radiation.

Because of this, the Commonwealth of Virginia has protected firefighters by covering twelve cancers in the firefighter occupational cancer presumption code (§ 65.2-402). However, as additional cancers prove to impact firefighters at greater rates, firefighters and their families would benefit from the addition of these cancers to the code. Lung cancer, while understood to be covered under the respiratory disease statute, is often not covered because it is classified as cancer upon diagnosis. Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma is not currently addressed in the code. According to recent clinical research, it has been determined firefighters are 40% more likely to die from Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma than the general public.

Needed Action:

Based on existing research, the General Assembly can further protect our firefighters and their families by adding both Lung and Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma to the existing cancers covered under Virginia code § 65.2-402.

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The Virginia Professional Fire Fighters proudly represents nearly 11,000 firefighters, emergency medical providers and communications officers in over 60 localities across the Commonwealth of Virginia.