

Steve McLinden, CEO and Founder iTrackPPE, reports on creating practical solutions such as active tracking and maintenance as part of the wider strategy to mitigate contamination risks

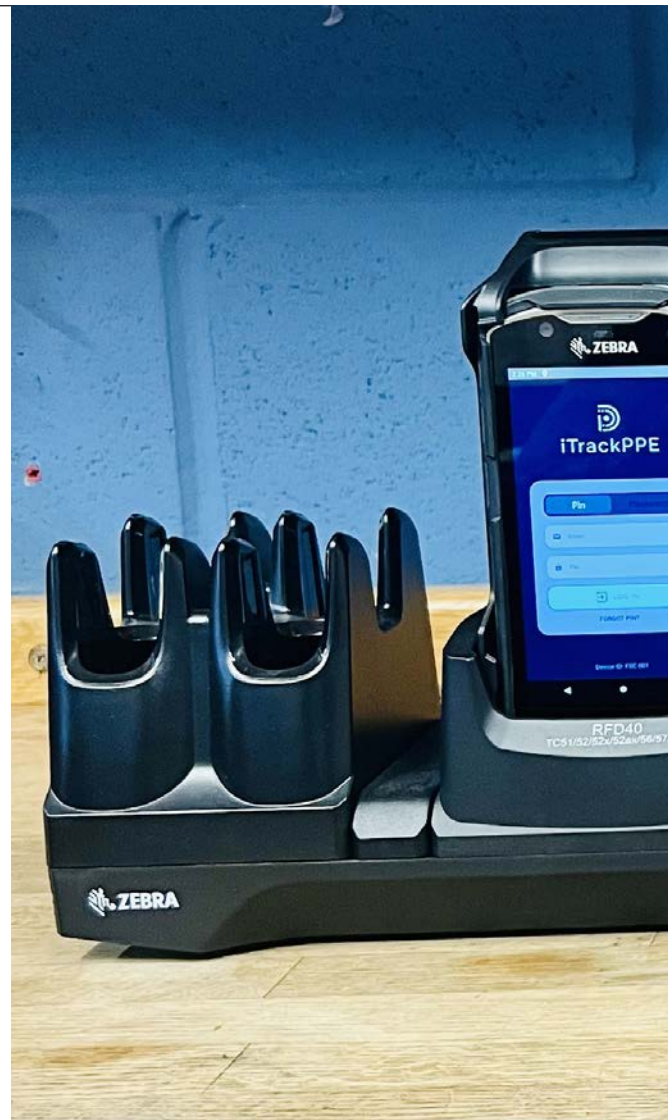
Mitigating cancer risks for firefighters: The imperative of clean PPE and strategic leadership

The Problem

In our realm of firefighting, a silent threat looms large: the exposure to contaminants that can lead to cancer. Particularly alarming is the rising incidence of cervical cancer among female firefighters. As our firefighting community grapples with this emerging risk, it becomes imperative to delve into the academic data and explore proactive measures to safeguard our current and future firefighting colleagues.

According to recent studies, firefighters face a heightened risk of developing various cancers due to prolonged exposure to carcinogens present in smoke, soot, and other hazardous materials encountered during firefighting operations and held in the PPE. Moreover, female firefighters in particular are witnessing increased levels of cervical cancer, raising concerns about the unique challenges they face in this predominantly male-dominated profession.

Academic research underscores the urgency of addressing this issue head-on. Studies by Dr Anna Stec and others have highlighted the correlation between



occupational exposure in firefighting and elevated cancer risks. The need for comprehensive strategies to mitigate these risks cannot be overstated.

The Advocates

Campaigners such as John Lord have been instrumental in shedding light on the reality of this threat and its consequences on those individuals and their families. He is supported by many enterprises, including iTrackPPE, which has created practical solutions as part of the wider strategy to mitigate these risks. Their endeavours emphasise the critical role of access to clean personal protective equipment (PPE) in reducing the likelihood of carcinogen exposure.

iTrackPPE's advocacy for the active tracking and maintenance of PPE history offers invaluable insights and future proofs organisations for the imminent changes in the standards for PPE. By maintaining concise records of both the PPE assets and the individual wearer's history, fire and rescue services (FRS) can enhance accountability and ensure the

“The call to action is clear: we must prioritise the health and safety of our colleagues and other first responders who are exposed to this daily risk”



timely replacement of equipment reaching the end of its service life.

Furthermore, the adoption of new technologies like intelligent distribution and tracking of operational assets using RFID, combined with regular liquid CO₂ cleaning for PPE emerges as a game-changer, effectively removing contaminants and prolonging the lifespan of protective gear.

A Unified Strategic Approach

However, the responsibility does not rest solely on firefighters and their immediate circles. FRS strategic leaders must champion this cause, driving forward initiatives aimed at minimising cancer risks. With more FRS's looking to set up 'Contamination working groups' to address these issues, the goal must be to establish a unified, standardised approach to providing clean PPE and consider implementing regular CO₂ washing protocols across all firefighting operations. Otherwise, the potential for resource intensive repetition of processes to reach the same conclusion within each FRS will occur, creating the inevitable delays in implementation and possible inconsistent degrees of protection.

Moreover, collaboration with PPE manufacturers is paramount. By continuously refining materials and designs, manufacturers can contribute significantly to enhancing the protective capabilities of firefighting gear.

Innovations aimed at improving breathability, comfort, and durability without compromising safety are crucial in this regard.

Time to Act

The call to action is clear: we must prioritise the health and safety of our colleagues and other first responders who are exposed to this daily risk. By instituting robust measures for the procurement, maintenance, and utilisation of PPE, coupled with ongoing research and development efforts, adoption of new technologies for the distribution, management and tracking of PPE and all operational assets, we can mitigate the occupational hazards faced by our firefighter colleagues.

In conclusion, the spectre of cancer looms large over our firefighting community, necessitating a concerted and multifaceted response. Through the adoption of best practices advocated by strategic entities like the NFCC, representative bodies, campaigners like John Lord and organisations like iTrackPPE Limited, coupled with proactive leadership and collaboration across the sector, we can aspire, no advance towards a future where the risk of cancer among firefighters is minimised, if not eradicated entirely. It is a mission that demands our unwavering commitment and collective action.

Steve@itrackppe.com
www.itrackppe.com