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ALBERTA PROFESSIONAL



2024



# CURTIS OSCAR NOBLE LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

FIRE FIGHTERS & PARAMEDICS  
ASSOCIATION

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Since 1908, representing over  
4,000 public safety professionals  
who proudly keep communities  
safe across Alberta and the  
Northwest Territories

Alberta Professional Fire Fighters & Paramedics Association

Affiliated with  
**International Association  
of Fire Fighters**



## Legislator Briefing Book

### INFORMATION OVERVIEW

- Who We Are?
- Finding Solutions - Dual Trained Fire Fighter - Paramedics Role in EMS
- Cancer in the Fire Service
- Catastrophic Event Coverage - Lasting Negative Impacts for Fire Fighters

### Lobby Overview

- Collaboration with government regarding the EMS crisis in Alberta
- Improvement and expansion of WCB approved presumptive cancer coverage
- Cancer registry for any and all Fire Fighters diagnosed in Alberta
- Defining “Catastrophic Event” and establishing legislation to protect public safety personnel from the exposures faced at these events.
- Request for the Government of Alberta to amend the budget on Alberta Pension Services Corporation to allow for more administration to research a proposed 2.33% LAPP Supplementary Pension Plan for all Public Safety Officers.

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## Our Affiliates

The APFFPA is comprised of 22 local Associations from across Alberta with the inclusion of Yellowknife of the NorthWest Territories. Seven (7) of our IAFF affiliated Associations are Integrated Fire-EMS Departments who deliver both ALS ambulance and medical first response throughout their communities. Five of our affiliate Associations include Emergency Dispatchers, which provide professional call-taking and dispatching for 2867 communities across Alberta. Our newest affiliate local represents Paramedics in Central Alberta.

IAFF Local 209 Edmonton, AB  
IAFF Local 237 Lethbridge, AB  
IAFF Local 255 Calgary, AB  
IAFF Local 263 Medicine Hat, AB  
IAFF Local 1190 Red Deer, AB  
IAFF Local 2130 St Albert, AB  
IAFF Local 2461 Strathcona County, AB  
IAFF Local 2494 Fort McMurray, AB  
IAFF Local 2770 Grande Prairie, AB  
IAFF Local 2890 Yellowknife, NWT  
IAFF Local 3021 Spruce Grove, AB  
IAFF Local 4705 Canmore, AB  
IAFF Local 4739 Leduc, AB  
IAFF Local 4778 Airdrie, AB  
IAFF Local 4794 Rocky View County, AB  
IAFF Local 4819 Cochrane, AB  
IAFF Local 4829 Okotoks, AB  
IAFF Local 5108 Grande Prairie County, AB  
IAFF Local 5182 Lloydminster, AB  
IAFF Local 5277 Fort Saskatchewan, AB  
IAFF Local 5284 Chestermere, AB  
IAFF Local 5842 Medavie West

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## What We Do

### Firefighting

Alberta Professional Fire Fighters mitigate all types of fires. From single and multi-family residential structures, industrial complexes, schools, vehicles and wildland fires, IAFF members are on the frontlines serving their communities. The number of fire fighters responding to a fire varies from one jurisdiction to the next and can depend on the severity of the incident. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) recommends that 15-17 personnel respond to a single-family house fire due to the many tasks, responsibility and safety concerns required of our members on an active fire scene.

### Auto Extrication and Equipment Rescue

At times, fire fighters are required to stabilize vehicle accident scenes and to plan an efficient and expedient rescue. When a few wasted seconds can cost lives, sometimes the “Jaws of Life” are utilized to remove victims from the damaged vehicle. These hydraulic tools are specially designed to cut materials quickly and efficiently to extricate patients from these damaged vehicles. Often, the fire fighter must ensure that the vehicle is stable. This safety concern needs to be mitigated during the rescue, ensuring not only safety for the fire fighters and paramedics attending, but the patients entrapped. This helps the injured or trapped patients by ensuring fire fighters and paramedics have access and can provide medical assistance. These interventions could include neck and spine stabilization, fracture stabilization, managing life threatening blood loss, airway control, oxygen administration or intravenous access.

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## EMS and Medical First Response

We respond to all manner of emergencies involving adults, children's, the elderly and patients with disabilities. These calls could be for something as minor as a ground level fall, questions about medication usage or serious emergencies like a heart attack, stroke, choking emergencies or cardiac arrest. Paramedics and Fire fighters across Alberta respond to EMS 911 Emergencies as well as provide Medical First Response (MFR).

## Hazardous Materials Response

The number of unknowns often pose a larger threat than the spill, leak, fire or break. HazMat teams are trained to handle material spills, leaks and fires. Types of incidents can include chlorine leaks, ammonia leaks, gasoline and diesel spills and natural exposures such as H<sub>2</sub>S. These incidents can occur from accidents or mechanical failures of valves and piping from fuel tankers, rail cars, boats and industrial accidents. In addition to chemical spills, our hazardous material specialists are also trained to respond to emergencies involving radioactive materials. Mitigation techniques involve gross decontamination with water, neutralizing agents and control of the incident through multi-agency incident command systems.

## Technical Rescue

Technical Rescue can be broken down into many different, but related, disciplines. Rope rescue, including high, low and slope rescue, and confined space rescue. All of these rescues involve proficiency in rope systems, rigging and specialized techniques to access and extricate patients. Technical rescue also involves heavy vehicle extrication. Various techniques in vehicle access, stabilization and patient removal with heavy vehicles need specialized equipment and training to perform these methods on large vehicles such as construction equipment and large heavy hauler trucks. Many of our members are also trained in trench rescue aiding municipalities and mutual aid partners in the specialized techniques needed to access and extricate patients involved in trench collapses.

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## Aquatic Rescue

Aquatic Rescue can be broken down into many different but related disciplines. Open water (lakes and sloughs), swift water (rivers and streams), surface ice rescue and dive operations cover the majority of responses needed within any municipality or region that has lakes, streams or rivers which frequent recreational usage. Our fire fighters and paramedics respond to these calls with a variety of apparatus including outboard motor boats, jet boats, fan boats and various ice rescue devices to aid in access to patients in need.

## Dispatch Services

IAFF Dispatchers provide professional call-taking and dispatching for 286 communities across Alberta. Operating from municipalities like Red Deer, Grand Prairie, Lethbridge, Strathcona County and Fort McMurray. These members have front line knowledge of what we as fire fighters do and are essential to a successful fire response.

## Fire Prevention and Community Education

The Fire Prevention Branch's across the province have certified Alberta Safety Codes Officers designated by the Alberta Safety Codes Council. The services these IAFF members offer include:

- **Fire Inspection Services:** conducting routine inspections of commercial businesses, public buildings and multi-family residential occupancies. The inspections limit the risk to life and property loss by identifying conditions which could contribute to the start and spread of smoke and fire.
- **Fire Investigations:** every fire or explosion that results in property damage, injury, death and arson are investigated to determine the origin, cause and

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circumstances of each event. Incident Commanders will initiate the investigation immediately after the fire is brought under control. The results of the investigations are forwarded to the Alberta Fire Commissioner's office for statistical purposes to amend or change current safety codes.

- Public Education: IAFF members have established a variety of different programs to educate citizens within the communities they serve. Our members provide not only fire safety information but ensure their citizens have working smoke alarms and are prepared for a fire before it occurs. Many departments across Alberta provide fire safety courses through schools and community groups to ensure everyone is educated in fire prevention and safety.

## Working Together

The Alberta Professional Fire Fighters and Paramedics Association (APFFPA) has a long history of collaborating and working with the Government of Alberta. We are always working towards finding solutions to problems facing fire fighters, paramedics, and dispatchers. Professional fire fighters in Alberta serve the citizens in every major city and are responsible for ensuring the public safety of over seventy-five (75) percent of the provincial population. It is the APFFPA's stance that through collaboration, we can aid the government in finding positive solutions to problems that are both productive and fiscally responsible for the citizens of Alberta.

Our success', in large measure, is attributed to the Government of Alberta's strong support and assistance. The Alberta Government has historically been a leader in Canada and Internationally at introducing legislation that helps protect fire fighters, paramedics, their families, and the citizens of Alberta.

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*Notable legislation that has been passed to improve public and fire fighter safety through collaborative work with the Government of Alberta and the APFFPA include*

**2003 - Bill 102: Workers Compensation (Fire fighters) Amendment Act**

- This marks the first introduction of presumptive cancer legislation for fire fighters in Alberta.

**2004 - Bill 207: Amendment to Highway Traffic Act**

- Requires motorists to reduce their speed to 60 km/hr when passing through an accident scene where emergency workers are present.

**2006 - Bill 26: Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act**

- Provides rights to Alberta Emergency Responders to oblige any person who may have exchanged bodily fluids with emergency workers to submit a blood sample for testing.

**2012 - Bill 1: Workers Compensation Act**

- Emergency Responder presumptive coverage for those diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

**2016 - Bill 30: Review of WCB Employment Standards**

- Inclusion of emergency communication operators to the presumptive PTSD coverage and adding additional presumptive cancer to cover ovarian and cervical cancers.

**2020 - Bill 47: Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act**

- Provides funding to eligible families of first responders who made the ultimate sacrifice providing public safety to their community.

**2021 - Supporting Psychological Health in First Responders Grant Program**

- Delivering and evaluating an established model of peer support for Alberta's first responders. Alberta Critical Incident Provincial Network.

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## 2023 - Bill 9: Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act

- Provides WCB presumptive cancer coverage for fire fighters who fought the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfires.

## 2023 - Ministerial Order - Review of WCB Employment Standards

- The addition of Primary Site Mesothelioma, Pancreatic, Soft Tissue Sarcoma and Thyroid Cancer, in addition, the regulation regarding Colorectal Cancer latency was reduced from twenty (20) to fifteen (15) years.

## Fire Medical Response - Over 100 Years of History in Alberta

The Integrated Fire-EMS service model had its beginnings right here in Alberta. Lethbridge Fire and Emergency Services has been providing pre-hospital care for their citizens since 1912, the longest in North America. Currently seven (7) APFFPA local Associations are from Integrated Fire-EMS Departments. These departments deliver the gold standard in pre-hospital care. All of these Integrated Fire-EMS departments offer ALS ambulance service in addition to ALS medical first response with fully equipped fire apparatus.

Throughout the Alberta EMS crisis, these departments have not lowered their level of service, nor have they failed to ensure their units are ready to respond wherever they are required.

## Utilizing the Efficiencies of the Integrated Fire-EMS System

All municipalities are different, the needs from each region require an emergency response plan that serves their individual community. Whether they are fire fighters in cities like Medicine Hat, Calgary and Edmonton, or dual trained fire fighter - paramedics in cities like Red Deer, Strathcona County or Fort McMurray, all 4000+ Alberta IAFF members are first responders attending all manner of emergencies. They are healthcare workers who play a critically important role in Alberta's pre-hospital care and emergency response systems.

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In 2009, Alberta Health Services (AHS) assumed governance of emergency medical services in the province. Seven (7) Alberta cities have been contracted to provide EMS to their municipalities since that decision was made.

The term pre-hospital care refers to situations that require immediate emergency intervention, patient care and transport to a medical facility, hospital or urgent care center. This system in Alberta operates in a variety of forms. All of these service types can be described under the banner of EMS. They are all utilized with the same objective, a fast and highly skilled emergency response in the critical first few minutes following a medical emergency. In critical incidents such as a heart attack or stroke, or a traumatic incident occurring from a car accident, response times are critical. These Integrated Fire-EMS Departments offer exceptional response times with ALS capability to mitigate or stabilize patients in these critical moments where intervention matters most. These quick response times, followed up with the gold standard in pre-hospital care, affects patient outcomes in these communities. There are many success stories of critical emergencies and positive patient outcomes following an ALS medical first response from a fire apparatus, providing patient care with ALS interventions awaiting transport from a ground ambulance. If a Basic Life Support (BLS) unit arrives, the ability to provide continuity and to continue ALS care exists with our fire fighter - ACP members able to continue the call and transport with the BLS unit to the hospital.

As communities continuously evaluate their emergency medical care needs, they may have the tendency to focus exclusively on ground ambulance response and patient transport issues. Most research on patient survival however, has demonstrated that rapid on-scene medical intervention is critical and produces the best patient outcomes. Fire departments are best positioned to deliver time critical response and effective patient care. Fire fighters, who act as first responders through AHS's Medical First Response (MFR) program are commonly first on the scene, providing medical intervention until a ground ambulance arrives.

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While municipalities and the province are looking to find efficiencies in EMS services, it only makes sense to examine the underutilized and under-recognized role of fire fighters. The personnel are there, ready to respond and serve their communities.

Taking advantage of the existing infrastructure is an achievable means of affecting tactical benchmark EMS response times, while utilizing financial sustainability.

## Fire Fighting and Cancer

Fire fighters face a wide variety of hazards while carrying out the occupational obligation of saving lives and reducing property damage. Fire fighters are routinely exposed to burning chemicals and other toxins while protecting the lives and property of fellow citizens. However, even with the best respiratory practices and personal protective equipment, exposures will continue to occur due to these chemicals as it is absorbed through the skin as we sweat. The concentration of chemicals in today's materials is much higher than in the past due to increased use of composite materials.

Epidemiological, medical, and scientific studies conclusively demonstrate an increased rate of cancer in the fire fighter occupation versus the general population. These studies show a statistically significant increase that cannot be explained by chance alone. The medical evidence shows that fire fighters have anywhere between two (2) and four (4) times the risk of cancer compared to the general population. The International Institute of Research on Cancer (IARC), in 2022, classified the occupation of fire fighter as a Group 1 carcinogen. This classification confirms that being a fire fighter is conclusively cancer causing. While detailed quantification of specific exposures may be difficult to accurately track, fire fighters are continually exposed in uncontrolled settings to an increasingly complex mix of toxic chemicals, including many known and suspected carcinogens and mutagens.

Today's residential fires have more in common with hazardous material events than residential home fires of years past due to the synthetic materials and construction. Commercial and vehicle fires have highly concentrated toxicants with hazardous smoke. Dumpster fires contain completely unknown contents where a fire fighter could

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potentially be exposed to completely unknown substances and toxins. Following the lungs, the skin is the body's second largest organ in surface area, and it is highly absorptive. Some areas of the body are more permeable than others, specifically the face, the angle of the jaw, the neck, throat and groin. The skin's permeability increases with temperature and for every five (5) degree increase in skin temperature, there is a 400% increase in absorption of the toxins. The fire fighters body temperature rises significantly, not only from the physical activity doing whatever task is assigned, but the heavily insulated personal protective equipment that is essential for them to do their jobs.

Multiple studies have repeatedly demonstrated credible evidence and biological credibility for statistically higher rates of multiple types of cancers in fire fighters.

“Pinpointing the cause of cancer is extremely difficult because fire fighters are not exposed to just one agent. They are exposed to multiple cancer causing agents. Because of the multiple exposures and the multiple routes of exposure - they inhale carcinogens and carcinogens are absorbed through the skin - it is also highly unlikely for fire fighters to get only one type of cancer.” said Grace Le Masters, Ph.D, a professor of epidemiology at the University of Cincinnati and the lead author of a 2006 meta-analysis of 32 published studies of cancer in fire fighters. Based on their analysis there was a significantly increased risk among fire fighters for many cancers.

## Fire Fighter Presumptive Cancer

As the Government of Alberta undertakes periodic reviews of the Workers Compensation Board regulations, the APFFPA, would request the opportunity to submit information, and recommendations for review and consideration regarding the occupational cancer risks fire fighters face every day.

- Presumptive cancers for fire fighters are specifically governed by the Fire fighters' Primary Cancer Site Regulation, applying to section (24.1(4)) of the Workers Compensation Act.

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- Firefighting is unique among the professions in that it can only mitigate, rather than completely avoid, exposure to harmful elements such as benzene or concentrated hydrocarbons.
- As such, primary site cancer regulations governing presumptive cancers for fire fighters have been developed and widely adopted across Canada.
- Enacting the regulation in 2003, Alberta was following the lead of Manitoba's 2002 provincial government, which was the first in Canada to enact presumptive legislation specifically for fire fighters. This regulation was built on the large body of evidence developed and examined from across Canada and other international jurisdictions that demonstrated that fire fighters were at increased risk for specific types of cancers.
- Since that time, Alberta has followed that lead closely, with periodic reviews to attempt to align with other provincial regulations. All provinces now have legislation of this type.

## Developing Science and Legislation

As our knowledge about cancer in the fire service increases, so does the need for additional workplace protections. Several cancers that have been linked to the profession of fire fighting and are covered in other North American jurisdictions have yet to be added to Alberta's WCB Regulations. Cancers including:

### Primary Site Penile Cancer

Penile Cancer has not been added as a primary site cancer, many other provinces now included Primary Site Penile Cancer to their presumptive cancer legislation for fire fighters. These provinces include British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and the Yukon. It is our anticipation that as provinces review their presumptive cancer legislation, they will include Primary Site Penile Cancer into their

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respective legislation. The inclusion of Primary Site Penile Cancer aligns with research and following suit with provinces on the forefront of this issue. The APFFPA is asking for the addition of Primary Site Penile Cancer to the WCB Alberta presumptive legislation with a latency period of 10 years.

### **Primary Site Larynx Cancer**

Larynx cancer has not been added as a primary site cancer, at this point only, Quebec is the only province to include primary site larynx cancer into their presumptive cancer legislation for fire fighters. With more larynx cancer diagnosis' arising throughout our profession the need for presumptive coverage is crucial, we hope that Alberta can lead Western Canada to show the need for this legislation. The APFFPA is requesting the addition of Primary Site Larynx Cancer to the Alberta WCB presumptive cancer legislation with a latency period of 15 years.

### **Catastrophic Traumatic Exposure Coverage**

The Alberta Professional Fire Fighters and Paramedics Association (APFFPA) will lobby for any and all occupational presumption required to protect our members.

2023 has seen more wildfire and urban interface mutual aid requests across Alberta and the Northwest Territories, our members are being requested to help fight massive fires without the presumptive coverage required to ensure affiliates and their families are not being left behind.

The acute and extended periods of toxic and carcinogenic smoke in the days and weeks following the associated fires are believed to be higher in comparison to what a fire fighter may face in their entire career.

University of Alberta studies of 1200 fire fighter participants show 1 in 7 fire fighters are still experiencing chronic issues since the Fort McMurray Fires in 2016.

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The APFFPA's priorities regarding this critical legislation includes but not limited to:

- A provincial designation/definition of a Catastrophic Incident. The APFFPA has been in discussion about this item with various MLA's and Minister's and is committed to ongoing conversations about this issue.
- All public safety personnel that respond to any designated Catastrophic Incident are eligible for Catastrophic Traumatic Exposure (CTE) presumptive WCB coverage. It is presumed that those that develop long-term health effects, including diminished lung function, cancer, and mental health injuries would have incurred any and all previously mentioned while conducting their duties during the incident.

## **LAPP: Sponsor Board Request**

The APFFPA met and formally requested to be added to the LAPP Sponsor Board in September of 2024 where we were subsequently denied our request.

Fire fighters in Alberta were instrumental into the construction of the current LAPP Joint Governance board model at its inception. The composition of that board was made up through legislation and no additions have been made to include representatives of fire fighters in Alberta. Other provinces ensure fire fighter participation on their provincial pension boards as our pension needs are unique in comparison to many others in the public sector.

Where fire fighters were represented by the Alberta Federation of Labour previously, many Alberta affiliate locals have disaffiliated from the AFL as many felt fire fighters were not represented adequately. At this current moment, Alberta fire fighters are not represented on the LAPP Sponsor Board.

Our request is to be added, through legislation, to the LAPP Sponsor Board.

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## WCB: Increase to Max Assessable Income

As the annual income of Firefighters and Paramedics have increased through collective bargaining in attempts to keep up with the increasing cost of living. WCB has not continued to adequately compensate Firefighters, Paramedics, and their respective municipal and contractor employers.

The current max assessable earning WCB supports in Alberta is 102,000 annually. Currently, all professional Firefighters and Paramedics represented by the APFFPA earn higher than the maximum compensation offered by WCB for occupational physical and mental health injuries.

Among Alberta firefighters and paramedics, seventeen (17) out of twenty-one (21) have employer top up. This top up allows Firefighter's and Paramedic's to be made whole with wages ensuring no financial hardship exists while recovering and preparing for their return into the workplace.

This employer top up comes at a cost to municipalities across Alberta rather than the organization legislated to provide compensation for firefighters and paramedics injured while providing service to Albertans.

Currently, Alberta's max assessable earnings is behind:

Manitoba:	160,510
British Columbia	112, 800
Ontario	112,500
Northwest Territories	110,600
Nunuvut	110,600

We hope to increase Alberta's WCB max assessable earnings to reduce the financial burden imposed on firefighters, paramedics and their employers. With Alberta firefighter and paramedic wages encroaching on 120,000 in 2024 it is time for the WCB max assessable earnings be increased appropriately to compensate first responders and their employers for injuries incurred responding to all matter of emergencies they are called to attend.

The APFFPA's request is to have this maximum income increased to 140,000.

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