

FIREFIGHTER SAFETY IN SPRING WEATHER

By Scott Eskwitt

As we come into the spring months, it's a good time to review some Lexipol policies relevant to the changing weather and firefighter safety conditions. The changing weather conditions create special issues impacting operations, personnel performance and firehouse safety. Additionally, remember your equipment needs specific attention both at the scene and back at the station.

Following are some policy areas to review with your crew in advance of responses that come with warmer weather conditions. Understanding their application will enhance firefighter safety and improve fire operations.

General Operations

Incident Management: As the weather begins to warm, consider planning for personnel to establish and staff a Rehab Division upon arrival to a scene where investigation or operations may continue for longer than 30 minutes.

Emergency Response: Drivers should be aware of the potential for rapidly changing road conditions, including bridges freezing before roads, melting snow or freezing rain. The area around the station may be dry, but road conditions can change en route. Set engine retarders and traction controls according to department policy and as conditions dictate.

Swiftwater Rescue and Flood Search and Rescue Responses: With runoff from winter snowpack, local waterways may flow at a higher level and faster rate than normal, catching pedestrians and motorists off guard. Personnel should be reminded to wear appropriate PPE, including personal flotation devices. Only personnel trained for water search and rescue should participate in these operations.

Wildland Firefighting: Dry conditions already exist in many areas of the country and other areas are drying quickly. Refresher training on wildland fire tactics and response should be given to personnel.

Staging: When possible, avoid staging over running water from melting snow or ice. Consider staging away from surrounding conditions that could cause other vehicles to lose control or create unsafe conditions for personnel or apparatus.

Training

Wildland Fire Shelter Deployment: Fire shelter deployment training should be provided for all personnel who respond to wildland fire incidents. A review of [National Wildfire Coordinating Group pamphlet #2710 "The New Generation Fire Shelter"](#) as well as practical exercises should be included.



Safety

Illness and Injury Prevention Program: Consider having the Health and Safety Officer include warm and cold weather operations safety as part of new member orientation or scheduled safety meetings. Consider distributing weather safety advisories as the weather begins to turn.

Apparatus/Vehicle Backing: Personnel involved in backing operations can be exposed to weather elements or fire conditions. When backing into a wildland incident, personnel should maintain situational awareness. Remind drivers/operators to immediately stop if they lose sight of spotters and remain stopped until visual contact is re-established.

Fire Station Safety: It is never too early to start spring cleaning. Warmer weather will allow personnel to remove winter equipment stored inside the station and place it in proper storage locations out of the way of daily operations. Personnel should also inspect the outside of the station for any damage that may have occurred during the winter months and report conditions requiring repair.

Every year, spring weather and safety conditions are at the crux of predictable and preventable accidents. By reviewing these policies and training on firefighter safety in advance, you can help mitigate know risks and protect your yourself, your team and your community.

Lexipol's [Fire Policy Manual and Daily Training Bulletin Service](#) provides essential policies to enhance the safety of firefighters in all areas of department operations. [Contact us today to find out more.](#)



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