

# Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service

## Fire Chief's General Order

NUMBER: 14-11

May 21, 2014

TO: All MCFRS Personnel

FROM: Fire Chief Steven E. Lohr



SUBJECT: Respiratory Protection / Cancer Prevention

MCFRS Policy 26-06AMII *Respiratory Protection Policy* requires the use of Respiratory Protection Equipment (RPE) in atmospheres that are immediately dangerous to life and health (IDLH) and in "hazardous and/or toxic atmospheres." A hazardous and toxic atmosphere is defined by Policy 26-06AMII as "... an environment that may present or contain respiratory hazards during MCFRS activities, including, but not limited to, those related to overhaul, hazardous materials, EMS, and fire investigations operations."

In light of the growing scientific information linking cancer to firefighting, and in an effort to promote the health and wellness of MCFRS personnel, the use (as defined in Policy 26-06AMII) of ***appropriate RPE during the entirety of overhaul operations is now mandatory***. Personnel ***must*** use RPE until the atmosphere is free from all fire by-products – even in the *absence* of an IDLH atmosphere.

Fighting fires is dangerous in more than one way. Medical studies have demonstrated statistically higher rates of cancer occurring in firefighters as compared to the general public. Moreover, in the past 5 years, FROMS has identified 37 life-threatening illnesses among MCFRS personnel during their annual physicals, twelve of which were cancer. Those cancer diagnoses do not include cancer diagnosed by *outside* medical providers, adding to the total number of MCFRS personnel who have had a cancer diagnosis.

By making the use of appropriate RPE during the entirety of overhaul operations ***mandatory***, MCFRS strives to reduce the incidence of cancer among all MCFRS personnel.