

Saskatchewan Fire Fighters Will Now Lead the Country for Occupational Cancer Coverage

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 26, 2023



REGINA – Saskatchewan’s professional fire fighters are welcoming news in Wednesday’s Throne Speech that the province will add six cancers to the list of those deemed occupational among the profession, which means the province will lead the nation in presumptive cancer coverage.

The added coverage will help ensure fair compensation to fire fighters who contract those cancers and to their families, says Saskatchewan Professional Fire Fighters and Paramedics Association President Lloyd Zwack.

The Saskatchewan Government announced that six cancers – pancreatic, thyroid, penile and laryngeal cancer along with mesothelioma and soft tissue sarcoma - will be added to the list of those presumed occupational among fire fighters with a specified number of years on the job, which facilitates the worker’s compensation claim process.

Those new cancers bring the number of those deemed occupational among Saskatchewan professional fire fighters to 22, a new national benchmark.

“We’re grateful to the Government of Saskatchewan for recognizing a broader range of cancers linked to our profession,” Zwack said. “Cancer is an epidemic in the fire service in Saskatchewan as it is across Canada, and this new coverage will ensure those affected by these cancers receive the care and the compensation they deserve,” he said.

Fire fighters experience high rates of cancer as a result of the toxic exposures they encounter in the course of their duties. More recently, it has been discovered that fire fighters are exposed to toxic substances called PFAS in the very bunker pants and jackets that are supposed to keep them safe.

Job-related cancer has emerged as the top danger facing those in the firefighting profession. In the 10-year period of 2013-2022, 474 professional fire fighters across Canada died from formally recognized occupational cancers, accounting for 94.4 per cent of all line-of-duty deaths during that timeframe.

Presumptive legislation for job-related illnesses linked to firefighting was first enacted in Manitoba in 2002, and now exists in all 13 provinces and territories. Saskatchewan’s first presumptive coverage was enacted in 2003 and has been expanded several times. In addition to cancers, Saskatchewan’s presumptive legislation for fire fighters also includes coverage for heart injury and post-traumatic stress.

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