

NEWS | FOR EMERGENCY SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

MEET THE NEW EVDT PROGRAM

We're launching an updated EVDT program that's designed to help address the modern risks of emergency vehicle operations and simplify processes to make the course more streamlined than ever!

In 1976, the VFIS team set out to help address one of the most-common, and sometimes most-overlooked, risks that first responders face each day: driving. That's when we developed the first-ever Emergency Vehicle Driver Training (EVDT) program—and it quickly became (and has remained) the gold-standard for driver training in the industry.

However, when it comes to driver training in emergency services—the work is never done. Especially when you consider that the NFPA reports that 19 firefighters lost their lives while responding-to or returning—from incidents in 2023, which is the highest amount since 2008. Further, the National Safety Council reports that there's been a slight

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upward trend of EMS vehicle-related fatalities—with 40 deaths in 2022 alone.

That's why, as a part of our mission to address your ever-changing needs and risks, we're excited to launch an updated EVDT program in 2025. Here are a few upgrades and modern touches you can expect.



UPDATED CURRICULUM

The updated materials and competency course will address the latest best practices for fire and EMS vehicles, including crew resource management, alternative fuels, a module dedicated to traffic incident management, and spotter-use during the competency course.

The layout of the book is a more traditional textbook with a modern look and in full-color.

FULL INTEGRATION WITH VFIS UNIVERSITY

The course will be connected to our online learning platform, VFIS University which is available at VFISu.com. Instructor updates and the resources necessary to present the course will be made available to authorized VFIS instructors through the instructor portal on VFIS University. This will improve the

distribution of materials and updated content to instructors and provide students with a single site to go to for their VFIS training certificates.

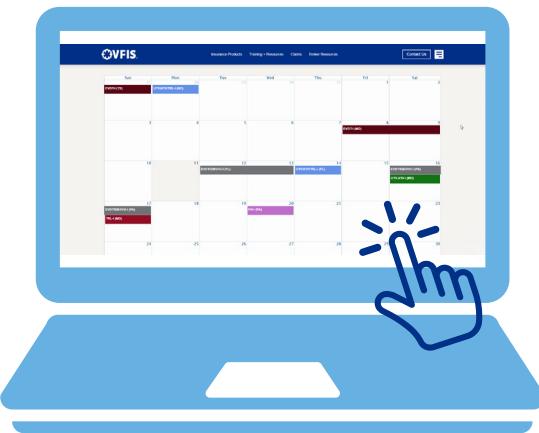
Training officers will be able to assign courses and report on the courses completed by the members of their department.

And, if you haven't checked out VFIS University recently, you're missing out on many specialized courses on a wide-variety of topics that you can take anytime—for free!

INSTRUCTOR UPDATES

There will be several updates to help simplify teaching processes and ensure that the very significant role of instructing this vital course remains in capable hands, including continued education and other information that will be available through our new Instructor Portal on VFIS University.

If you're an instructor and need to update your current email address to help ensure you receive notifications about these updates and others, please reach out to csapps@vfis.com.



HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN FIELD TRAINING WITH VFIS

Check out our in-person training calendar, available at vfis.com in the Training + Resources Portal, to see our upcoming schedule and find an

in-person learning opportunity near you. Each VFIS insured organization can nominate three participants to attend each class/topic per year for free, including our new EVDT program.

We're honored that so many of you have taken the course—and that some of you have even taken steps to become instructors so that you can spread the training's important best practices even further. Together, we've aided in saving countless lives, and that's something to be proud of.

We hope that this course will allow us to continue to serve as a trusted partner and additional training arm to your organization—and thank you for prioritizing safety.



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DON'T RISK IT!

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TOP 3 PODCAST EPISODES OF 2024

The VFIS team and special guests, including fellow first responders and industry specialists, come together bi-weekly to discuss the latest fire and EMS trends, safety best practices and industry news—and we're honored to share those conversations with you through the *Don't Risk It!* podcast series.

Here are the most listened-to episodes from the past year—all of which you can listen to anytime, anywhere (for free!) on your favorite podcast platform or at vfis.com/podcast.

- **ELECTRONIC VEHICLES & LITHIUM-ION BATTERIES**

Fire Chief Michael O'Brian from Brighton Area Fire Authority joins our podcast host, Chris Rogers, to share best practices for collecting and capturing the thermal batteries that are found in electronic vehicles, mobility devices and other devices.

- **SOGS VS SOPS**

Assistant Chief Bryan Duquin of Mountville Fire Company No. 1 joins Chris Rogers, Blair Tyndall and Mike Baker from VFIS Client Risk Solutions to talk about the difference between Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs) and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), why they're important, how to develop them and how they can be integrated into your organization's operations.

- **TELLING THE PATIENT REFUSAL STORY**

Paul Bachtel, VFIS Liability Claims, joins Mike Baker and Dave Bradley from our Client Risk Solutions team to discuss why you should be concerned about your patient refusal processes, as well as industry trends and best practices to help you stay protected.

SCAN TO
LISTEN NOW!





NOT ALL THREATS ARE VISIBLE

Cancer awareness and prevention is more than a buzzworthy topic. In fact, it's known to be one of the most dangerous risks that firefighters face today. According to research by the CDC and National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), firefighters have a 9% higher risk of being diagnosed with cancer and 14% higher risk of dying from cancer than the general U.S. population.

While there are several factors that contribute to firefighter cancer risks, the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) states that the most common route of exposure to carcinogens for firefighters is through inhalation. That's why it's crucial to help protect your crew against the hidden chemicals that are released in smoke and soot, as well as vehicle exhaust and other hazardous materials, during each and every call.

Here are tips to help your firefighters reduce their risks of inhaling or ingesting cancer-causing contaminants and dangerous airborne materials.

1. Put on your PPE—during every call, for the entire incident.

All responding firefighters should consider wearing full PPE, including properly-sealed self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) and masking-up, to help reduce your exposure to injury and illness—and that doesn't only apply to the free-burning phase of incidents.

In fact, the IAFF states that not wearing SCBA in both active and post-fire environments is the most dangerous voluntary activity in the fire service today. While firefighters may have not traditionally worn SCBA during salvage and overhaul phases, it's now known that combustion by-products can be even more prevalent during this time—making it equally important to remain in PPE for the entire incident.





2. Monitor air quality—especially in locations with limited air flow.

Consider staying aware of the air quality and potential threats throughout each call by using an air monitor according to the manufacturer's instructions. FirefighterNation.com recommends using the "ABC" technique, which stands for holding the monitor ("A") above your head, ("B") below your waist and ("C") at chest-level to check for gases of varying densities—and to "bump check" your air monitor before and after use to ensure it's working properly, as well as documenting your monitoring for department records.

3. If sudden death or respiratory arrest occurs—be aware that there could be a potential airborne exposure.

Nobody wants to think about a member collapsing on the scene, but it happens and it's vital to be aware of all of the potential causes and ramifications—even when emotions and adrenaline are running high. For example, a sudden death or respiratory arrest could be correlated with an airborne substance, like cyanide or phosgene gas, so it's important to always keep respiratory safety top-of-mind.

4. Clean-up—after every call.

Perform on-scene gross decontamination on PPE to remove as much contaminants as possible, says the IAFF. This includes wet washing PPE, gloves, hood, helmet and helmet lining, all according to NFPA guidelines. From there, they recommend bagging contaminated gear and storing it in an outside compartment (rather than the cab). Once you're back at the station, consider cleaning the interior of apparatus, keeping gear out of living and sleeping quarters, and using a diesel exhaust capture system.

Personnel should decontaminate themselves, too. This includes using wet wipes to remove soot from the head, neck, jaw, throat, underarms, hands and all areas of exposed skin and changing your clothes immediately after a fire, followed by showering thoroughly.

5. Incorporate respiratory protections into all relevant policies and procedures—and make them specific to your unique operations.

Depending on your operations, you may have additional considerations and unique procedures involving respiratory protections. For example, the *Respiratory Protection for Wildland Firefighters Market Survey Report* by the National Urban Security Technology Laboratory and Department of Energy Pacific Northwest National Laboratory that was released in 2022 sought to evaluate respiratory protections

for wildland firefighters. Their research compared “commercial-off-the-shelf products” and found that air-purifying respirators (APRs) and powered air-purifying respirators (PAPRs) were more effective against particulate and gas hazards than traditional methods, like bandanas and N95 masks, and more suitable to wildfire response operations in remote areas than more advanced methods, like SCBA.

As a firefighter, you’re likely a natural-born fixer and helper—so being up against silent and invisible threats like these could feel stifling. But it’s important to remember there are things you can do to help protect yourself and others, including revisiting your procedures for respiratory protection, reviewing your SOGs for use of protection on the fireground and completing your an annual SCBA fit-testing. Because instituting “smaller” policies like these, and ensuring that they’re practiced at each and every call, can truly make all of difference.





STATION CONVERSATION: WHAT'S TRENDING IN FIRE + EMS



Here's a round-up of 4 new-and-evolving topics in emergency services—and reasons why you may want to pay attention to them.

1.

FIREFIGHTER HEART HEALTH

Emerging monitoring technology

According to the National Fire Protection Association's annual report, sudden cardiac death remains the number one cause of on-duty firefighter fatalities in the U.S.—and has accounted for the largest share of firefighter deaths in almost every year of the report.

However, some hope could be on the horizon as the U.S. Fire Administration shared that the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) is working to develop a model for real-time heart health monitoring in firefighters. With the help of artificial intelligence (AI), NIST created a Heart Health Monitoring (H2M) model which has been able to determine cardiac rhythm abnormalities with 97% accuracy during test studies—and they hope to use that technology in a portable heart monitor to alert firefighters to seek medical attention before it is too late.

The ever-growing case for healthy living

While real-time heart health monitoring may not be available for

everyday use for quite some time, there is something you can do right now to help combat heart health



risks—and that's living a healthy lifestyle, including implementing a fitness regimen.

For instance, a recent study published by *Sage Journals*, “*The Effect of Mandatory Fitness Requirements on Cardiovascular Events: A State-by-State Analysis Using a National Database*,” sheds some light on why cardiovascular events may occur more frequently among firefighters in some regions than others—and, spoiler alert, there's a case to be made for implementing fitness standards within all types of fire departments.

Through investigating the rate of cardiovascular events among firefighters and examining if the

results to see if there were any correlations between the types of firefighters and their location, their findings showed that volunteer firefighters are significantly more likely to die of a cardiovascular event compared to career and wildland firefighters, both of which tend to have stricter fitness standards.

2.

INEQUITIES IN HEALTHCARE

Race discrimination in EMS care and beyond

“ESO,” a data and software company that serves emergency service organizations, released their “Index” which includes data from more than than 3,000 EMS agencies nationwide. As reported on by *JEMS*, there several findings in the Index that are worth bringing attention to, including some notable points that shed a light on inequities in healthcare based on a patient's race.

For example, their data showed that despite EMS documentation of severe pain, only 63% of Black and African American patients who were later confirmed to have long bone fractures in the hospital were administered prehospital pain medication,

compared to 73% of patients overall.

Further, this isn't only an EMS provider-specific issue as the research also found that only 17% of Black patients who suffered a cardiac arrest received bystander CPR, compared to 22% of patients overall. (And, of course, we'd hope that percentage of bystander CPR would be much higher overall, regardless of race.) The full report, which also included data related to the opioid epidemic, health and safety, patient offloading times and more, can be downloaded at eso.com.

A reminder on EMTALA

It's important to remember that there are federal laws in place to help protect individuals from unfair treatment and discrimination and that patients could take legal action against your organization if they suspect or believe that has taken place.

One of these laws is the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act (EMTALA), which is specific to care in the emergency room. This Act protects every individual's rights to receive an appropriate medical screen exam to check for an emergency medical condition and, if one is discovered, the right to treatment until the emergency medical condition is stabilized and appropriate transfer to another hospital, if needed. Anyone can file an EMTALA complaint at cms.gov.

3. A FOCUS ON WELLNESS

Behavioral health concerns

Your team is called to support others on some of their darkest days—and that selfless service can come at a price. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), an

estimated 30% of first responders develop behavioral health conditions, including depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), compared to 20% of the general population.

Further, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says that occupational stress of being a first responders can be associated with increased risk of serious mental health issues, including hopelessness, anxiety, depression, PTSD and suicidal behaviors, such as suicidal ideation and actualized attempts.

Whether it's the stigma associated with mental health or lacking a culture that prioritizes and celebrates individuals for seeking health, it's important to keep behavioral health top-of-mind and continue to look for ways to instill a culture of wellness, safety and health within your department. And please remember that the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is always only one call away.

Creating healthy & high-functioning departments

The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) has teamed up with the American Psychological Association (APA) and Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance (FBHA) to create the "Psychologically Healthy Fire Departments: Implementation Toolkit" to help emergency services leaders understand the link between member wellbeing and performance and take steps to better support their members.

Included in the Toolkit are six areas of focus that can help promote member wellbeing and department functioning, including member involvement, health and safety, member growth and development, work-life-volunteer balance, member recognition and effective communication.

The Toolkit notes that these are the types of factors that can lead to increased job satisfaction, higher morale, better physical and mental health, enhanced motivation and an improved ability to manage stress and be resilient—and that emergency

VFIS offers our Accident & Sickness (A&S) clients the option to add a low-cost Member Family Assistance Program (MFAP) to your policy.

This program gives you **24/7, 365 access to trained professionals that are available to assist you with crisis situations, behavioral health concerns and day-to-day life and wellbeing stressors. MFAP members can receive confidential and professional help through the dedicated VFIS MFAP help line **866.349.5579.****

service organizations can reap the benefits by seeing better performance and productivity, improved recruitment and retention and fewer accidents and injuries.

The toolkit, including best practices, a case study and additional resources, can be downloaded in-full at nvfc.org.

The importance of community

While it's widely understood that your social life is connected to the level of support and belonging you may have or feel, there hasn't been much research into modifying one's social network as active intervention for suicide prevention. That's why the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (ASFP) recently funded a study at the Georgia Institute of Technology to evaluate just that.

The simulation showed that even changing one feature of an individual's social network, like joining a new social group, had a good chance of reducing one's overall suicide risk. And, just as importantly, it didn't seem to increase the risk of suicide for those who were already doing well.

While more research on social network alteration is needed, the findings show that focusing on your social network could be impactful. This could be applied to fire and EMS departments in many ways, including creating more committees and opportunities for those who may not have strong connections within your department to engage and be social with others.

you money and time as well. That's why it's crucial to understand your members' legal rights as employees or volunteers of your organization to help ensure their rights are not violated, as well as provide continued education and reminders to help instill a respectful work environment.

EPLI Resources available to VFIS Clients

VFIS clients have access to a variety of educational courses to help your team better understand employment-related risks and appropriate behaviors, including annual refresher courses on VFIS University (available at VFISu.com), including Preventing Child Sexual Abuse and Misconduct, Sexual Harassment Prevention, Respectful Workplace and Workplace Violence Prevention.

Further, when you purchase EPLI insurance coverage through us, you also have access to an EPLI Helpline that you can call to speak with attorneys regarding general information about a broad range of human resources and employment law subjects, including topics that tend to be at the center of employment-related lawsuits.

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4. EPLI CONCERNs

Legal action against organizations related to Employment Practices Liability (EPLI) claims are on the rise, including allegations of sexual harassment, discrimination and wrongful termination. Not only could these claims have a negative impact on your reputation—they could cost



[EPLI Helpline info](#)

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- **Get the registration spreadsheet** via QR code or at VFISu.com.
- **Fill out your roster** by adding a new row for each member you want to register and completing columns A-D, F and G.
- **Email your form to csapps@vfis.com**, along with your name, department, state and phone number, and we'll reach out to help you to get started.



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**In memory of
Chief David P. Michaels**

1967- 2024

Dave's quiet leadership, steady mentorship, commitment to training and education, and dedication to service as Vice President of VFIS Education, Training and Consulting and retired Fire Chief of the York City Fire Department will have an everlasting impact on those who knew him and the entire emergency services community.

May we continue his legacy by practicing safety on the scene and in our lives each day.

Thank you, Dave.



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