



Preventing Lifting Strains for Firefighters

As we know, firefighting is one of the world's most dangerous professions, and our firefighters risk their safety and health daily while serving your municipality. Our bravest are dedicated civil servants who deserve compensation for injuries sustained in the line of duty. With that understanding, fire department workers' compensation claims are often the loss leader for our municipal members. So how do we reduce the number of claims, specifically those that occur most frequently, such as strain-related injuries?

Firefighting requires rigorous physical activity, putting stress on the body. As with most employees in physically demanding professions, stretching and staying physically fit helps the body withstand the physical requirements of the job. Fire departments can incorporate warm-up drills at the start of a training exercise for volunteers or throughout the day for full-time staff. In addition, firefighters should stay alert and practice situational awareness, as fatigue can lead to unsafe lifting techniques, causing an injury.

Operating a hose line can be strenuous on a firefighter's shoulders and back. Use the correct spinal placement, flexibility, and mobility to reach across your body. A great deal of core strength is needed to place yourself in the proper position to better lift, support, and move the hose. Remember, the firefighter controls and operates the hose; do not allow the hose to take over and create a dangerous situation.

A common injury for firefighters and EMTs is a back injury when lifting a stretcher or gurney. Remember to utilize a two-person lift when moving a gurney into an ambulance. Lift with your legs, not your back, and avoid a twisting movement. Like lifting other heavy objects, keep the gurney close to your body when loading it into the ambulance. Team lifting should be practiced routinely, equipment should be inspected before use, and situational awareness on the path of travel should be emphasized.



Additional strain-type injuries for firefighters:

- Using heavy equipment
- Manipulating tools under duress
- Wearing heavy gear during extreme heat or cold conditions
- Conducting unfamiliar drills

Controls include:

- Practice with equipment and understand its hazards
- Train with heavy tools like axes, ladders, and saws
- Maintain gear in good working order and prepare for extreme conditions
- Improve physical conditioning

It is vital to promote safety within your fire department and make every effort to reduce strain-related injuries your firefighters are likely to experience. Practice situational awareness with staff, improve physical conditioning, and train repeatedly with different equipment and conditions.

