

Purpose:

This policy outlines gross field decontamination of personal protective equipment (PPE) and personnel to remove soot and particulates.

Policy:

This policy outlines field decontamination of personal protective equipment (PPE), tools, skin, and clothing to remove both visible and invisible byproducts of combustion that result from firefighting operations whether in training or emergency responses. It is important for all personnel to understand the critical importance of personal decontamination as soon as practical after firefighting as doing so greatly reduces exposure to known carcinogens and may lessen the chance of developing cancer and/or any other disease processes.

Procedure:

1. After all firefighting operations, personnel should engage in both gross and personal decontamination. General principles of gross and personal decontamination include:
 - a. Clean hands and face with personal decontamination products prior to eating or drinking at the scene of a fire.
 - b. Keep neck and hood clean.
 - i. Wear a clean hood and maintain a clean neck to reduce exposure to carcinogens.
 - ii. Dirty hoods should not be worn around the neck when unnecessary (for example when staged outside a fire waiting for the “next assignment”). Hoods may be rolled down over the collar rather than against the skin or may be removed and stowed.
 - iii. Whenever a dirty hood is removed, personnel are to clean their necks with a decontamination product. Engineers can assist by making the decontamination product readily available.
 - iv. After any exposure (either interior or exterior) firefighters are encouraged to swap their hoods out during the incident.
 - v. If issued, firefighters are to always carry their second clean Nomex hood on the apparatus.
 - vi. When hoods are used, personnel will launder their dirty hoods.
 - c. The on-scene gross decontamination process should be a head-to-toe and front-to-back cleaning of PPE while both firefighters continue to stay “on air”.

- d. After firefighting operations, engage in gross decontamination of PPE and tools using a low-pressure stream of water, diluted PPE cleaning solution, and soft-bristled brush to remove gross contaminants.
 - i. The individual actively performing the decontamination will wear nitrile gloves and SCBA during gross decontamination.
 - ii. Medical aid gloves shall be worn whenever handling contaminated PPE, tools or equipment.
- e. After gross decontamination, remove PPE and utilize personal decontamination products to remove toxins from the skin. Use as many wipes or decontamination products as necessary to effectively clean visible contaminants, paying special attention to hands, face, neck, armpit, and groin.
- f. Avoid cross-contaminating apparatus. It is recommended that when returning to quarters, dirty PPE is to be stored remote from the cab in a sealed 6 ml plastic bag. Crews are to carry a clean set of clothing for use after gross decontamination as approved by each agency.
- g. Environmental and/or other unforeseen conditions may make it impractical to engage in gross and personal decontamination. However, it is important to remember that reducing the toxic load firefighters are exposed to by engaging in timely decontamination is critically important in reducing the risk of cancer and should be considered a high priority.
- h. Shower promptly upon return to quarters and personally decontaminate according to agency requirements.
- i. It is suggested that crews stay out of service until all personal decontamination (showering, PPE operationally ready, etc.) is complete.
- j. Crews are to ensure that the exposure is documented on agency required forms. For example, FireRMS, CAD notes, etc.
- k. It is recommended that whenever possible crews are to use Advanced PPE Washing Techniques as described by NFPA 1851 Standard

An example of decontamination procedures can be found here: [San Diego Fire Rescue Scene Decontamination Video](#)