

Testimony of Michael Belliveau,
Executive Director, Environmental Health Strategy Center
**in SUPPORT of LD 621, An Act Allowing Workers' Compensation Benefits
for Firefighters that Contract Cancer**
before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor
19 March 2009

Senator Jackson, Representative Tuttle and Members of the Committee on Labor, I am pleased to support LD 621 on behalf of the Environmental Health Strategy Center. We are a statewide public health organization that promotes human health, safer chemicals, and a sustainable economy (see www.preventharm.org). We support strongly LD 621 because the health science shows that firefighters deserve protection and compensation.

Firefighters are exposed to cancer-causing combustion byproducts

The many chemicals released during fires include dioxins, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), formaldehyde, and benzene, all of which are known or strongly suspected carcinogens.¹ Dioxins form whenever vinyl plastic (PVC) burns. Given widespread use of PVC pipes and vinyl siding, every house fire is like a toxic waste factory, spewing dioxins into the air and leaving toxic residues every where.² Even with the use of self contained breathing apparatus, firefighters experience significant chemical exposures during the lengthy period *after* the fire (known as “overhaul”).³

Firefighters suffer from higher rates of many cancers

A recent study published in the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine* provides strong evidence that fire fighters face significant risk of testicular cancer, brain cancer, melanoma (skin cancer), prostate cancer, esophageal cancer, and possibly leukemia.⁴ The study identified 3,659 California fire fighters who contracted cancer between 1988 and 2003 using the state's Cancer Registry. Conducted by Dr. Michael Bates from the University of California School of Public Health, this study had the advantage of including a greater number of firefighters with cancer than any prior research study. These findings confirm the results of more than a dozen smaller scientific studies that found that firefighters had elevated rates of ten different types of cancer.

Support a presumption that cancer in firefighters is work-related

Please support LD 621 to create a rebuttable presumption that firefighters' cancer is occupationally-related, making them eligible for workers compensation. Thank you.

¹ Clapp RW, Jacobs MM, Loechloer EL. 2007. **Environmental and Occupational Causes of Cancer**, New Evidence, 2005-2007. Lowell Center for Sustainable Production, University of Massachusetts Lowell. October.

² Thornton J. 2002. **Environmental Impacts of Polyvinyl Chloride Building Materials**. Washington DC: Healthy Building Network.

³ Bolstad-Johnson DM, Burgess DL, Crutchfield CD, Storment S, Gerkin R, Wilson JR. 2000. **Characterization of firefighters exposure during overhaul**. *American Industrial Hygiene Association Journal*. 61:636-641.

⁴ Bates, MN. 2007. **Registry-based case-control study of cancer in California firefighters**. *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*. 50(5):339-344.