



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

DATE ISSUED: May 30, 2007 REPORT NO: 07-104
ATTENTION: Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee
Agenda of June 6, 2007
SUBJECT: Fire-Rescue Department Regional Wellness Program - Overview and
Preliminary Results
REFERENCE:

REQUESTED ACTION: No action requested, informational report only.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: NA

SUMMARY: In January of 2005, the San Diego Fire-Rescue Department instituted a Regional Wellness Program with goals to develop, promote, enhance and maintain the wellness and fitness of the firefighters who serve the citizens and visitors of San Diego. Firefighting is known to be a dangerous occupation. What is less appreciated is that the most frequent cause of death among firefighters is heart disease. Nationally, cardiovascular events, largely due to coronary heart disease, account for over 50% of on-duty deaths. Low back injuries accounted for 50% of all line of duty injury retirements last year. Firefighters also are at increased risk of cancer:

- Twice as likely to develop testicular cancer
- 50% more likely to develop multiple myeloma and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- 28% more likely to develop prostate cancer

Given these occupational risks as well as others, the Wellness Program was initiated to identify and mitigate risks associated with firefighting. To date, this program has measurable successes and has demonstrated great value in improving the health and fitness of employees whose profession places them at heightened risk for job related illnesses and injuries.

The concept of "wellness" is vital in a profession which, by nature, requires its individuals to be healthy, prepared and able to perform skills which are physically demanding and in environments that are stressful to body and mind. The Wellness Program has provided a framework for conditioning our firefighters who are expected to perform under these conditions with the confidence that their physical and mental condition is up to the challenge and able to recover appropriately without a resultant injury or illness.

The components of the Wellness Program include regular medical examinations and immunizations, an exercise and nutrition program, fitness testing with peer coaching and associated equipment, a comprehensive rehabilitation program to improve health and fitness, and an organized approach to the collection of data which can measure success and highlight program needs.

Now, at two years of operation, the Wellness Program has demonstrated remarkable successes. There have been measurable reductions in the indicators which predict for increased morbidity, illness and disease:

- Improved laboratory values (reduction in cholesterol and fasting glucose levels)
- Improvement in vital signs (lower blood pressure, body weight and body fat)
- Improved overall strength and cardiovascular endurance
- Improvement in back endurance

In addition, there have been significant discoveries in personnel health, directly attributed to the Wellness Program, which would have most likely gone undetected:

- Early detection of cancer including cases of prostate cancer, leukemia and melanoma
- Early detection of coronary artery disease and significant heart related arrhythmias
- Detection of diabetes

In the future, it is projected that there will be significant reduction in work comp injuries and work comp costs. Other departments which have had a Wellness Program in existence for a longer period of time have shown a decrease in the overall cost and disability of work comp injuries.

Phoenix Fire Department has shown the following trends:

- Over the last five years there have been only eight long term loss injuries.
- There has been an average time/loss/injury decrease from 6.3 days to 2.6 days over the last five years.
- Overall medical costs have remained stable at about \$3.6 million over the last three years despite an average increase in workforce of about 15% per year and an industry increase in work comp costs exceeding 20% per year.

Orange County Fire Authority has shown:

- A significant downward trend in hours of work missed (4000 hours to less than 3000 hours) due to injury in firefighters from 2003 to 2005.
- A decrease in costs for lower back injuries from \$1.8 million to less than .7 million from 2003 to 2005 as well as a decrease in costs for other injuries.
- They have attributed this downward trend to several factors, good case management, good use of modified light duty, retirement of older workers and the WEFIT program (Orange County Firefighters' Wellness Program).

The Wellness staff has been working with San Diego State University to capture data on all the physiological parameters that we are measuring during the medical and fitness examinations. They have developed a very comprehensive database not only for SDFD but also for all the other departments that are involved in the Regional Wellness Program. The information they have obtained is being used now and in the future:

- To determine overriding risk factors of the firefighters as a group.
- To develop strategies for future education and other interventions to mitigate risk and improve health and well-being of the firefighters.
- For ongoing research on firefighters. Presently pursuing grant money to compare physiological findings in laboratory to actual physiological parameters out in the field.
- To market database to other departments that implement a similar wellness program.
- To develop more efficient ways of data collection.

Staff has also begun the process of collaborating with the City of San Diego Risk Management to obtain information regarding work comp costs prior to the inception of the Wellness Program. This information will be used for comparison with present and future work comp costs to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Wellness Program on reduction of injuries and associated costs.

At present, the cost of the Wellness Program for San Diego City Firefighters is \$820,000 annually. Outside revenue from other departments generates approximately \$120,000, leaving the net cost to the City of San Diego at \$700,000.

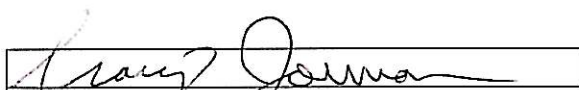

Medical experts often focus on the need for early disease detection and promote the prevention of disease through proper nutrition and exercise. The Wellness Program has demonstrated its effectiveness and afforded San Diego’s firefighters the opportunity to perform their public safety duties with the most vital tool available—their own health and fitness.

FISCAL CONSIDERATIONS: The Mayor’s proposed FY08 budget includes \$229,000 to augment existing appropriations and fully fund the Wellness Program.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL and/or COMMITTEE ACTION: On April 7, 2003, the City Council adopted Resolution R-297840 which authorized the City Manger to apply for a \$1,071,429 FEMA grant to initiate a Wellness Program for firefighters.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH EFFORTS: NA

KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND PROJECTED IMPACTS: NA

		
Tracy Jarman Fire Chief	JOM	Jill Olen Deputy Chief Operating Officer Public Safety/Homeland Security