

JERSEY FIREFIGHTERS NOW

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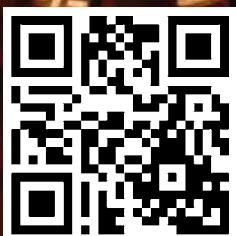
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**ON THE INSIDE:
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NEW JERSEY FIREHOUSES**

**ON THE HOT SEAT
INTERVIEW WITH:
CHIEF JAMES SAMARELLI**



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HEART ATTACKS: DON'T BECOME ANOTHER STATISTIC

By Matt Brzycki



By far, the main cause of death among firefighters in the line of duty is a heart attack. Typically, heart attacks account for roughly half of all firefighter fatalities. For example, the 2002 Firefighter Fatality Retrospective Study noted that there were 1,085 line of duty firefighter deaths in the United States over an 11-year period from January 1990 to December 2000. Of those deaths, 44% were attributed to heart attacks.

More recently, the U.S. Fire Administration noted that there were 83 line of duty firefighter deaths in 2011 and 58% of those deaths were attributed to heart attacks. This statistic includes three New Jersey firefighters, each of whom succumbed to a heart attack in the line of duty.

WHAT IS A HEART ATTACK?

A heart attack – a.k.a. myocardial infarction – is a condition in which the flow of blood to the heart is reduced to the point that a part of the cardiac muscle is damaged and/or dies. The reduced flow of blood is usually caused by coronary artery disease.

The most common symptom of a heart attack is persistent pain, discomfort or pressure in the chest that lasts longer than about three to five minutes, or it goes away and returns. The pain, discomfort or pressure may radiate to the shoulder, arm, neck or jaw. Other symptoms of a heart attack are trouble breathing, pale or ashen skin, profuse sweating, fatigue, lightheadedness, nausea, vomiting and loss of consciousness. Interestingly enough, some heart attacks are considered “silent,” meaning that the individual doesn’t exhibit any of the aforementioned symptoms.

A CLOSER LOOK

To better understand the different circumstances under which a heart attack can occur it’s worth taking a closer look at the specifics surrounding the line of duty deaths in 2011 of the three New Jersey firefighters. (Adapted from *Firefighter Fatalities in the United States in 2011*; U.S. Fire Administration, July 2012.)

1. On May 31, Thomas Shields, age 42, a Second Assistant Chief (volunteer) with the Flanders Fire Department, was dispatched to a local school that reported an ill child. After clearing the incident, he went to the station where he complained that he was hot and had chest pain. Chief Shields went home where he appeared pale and continued to complain about chest pain. He was transported to the hospital and died later that day.
2. On October 3, Andrew Boyt, age 45, a Lieutenant (career) with the Cape May Fire Department, was dispatched to a local hotel where a fire alarm was activated. At the scene, he donned full protective clothing and searched all three floors of the building. No fire was found and the alarm panel was reset. He returned to the station and was later dispatched to a private residence where a fire alarm was activated. No one was home and all entrances and windows

were locked. Lieutenant Boyt raised an extension ladder to the second floor and climbed it to look for an open window, repeating this at least three times. A key holder arrived and allowed access to the interior of the house. No fire was found, but Lieutenant Boyt used a step ladder to replace a smoke detector. He left the station at the end of his 24-hour shift. Later, Lieutenant Boyt was found slumped over the wheel of his car. He was transported to the hospital and didn’t recover.

3. On November 16, Jonathan Young, age 49, a Fire Captain (volunteer) with the Roselle Fire Department, was dispatched to a fire incident. As Captain Young drove his personal vehicle to the station in response to the call, he suffered a heart attack. His vehicle crashed into a fence and a tree. He was transported to the hospital, but was pronounced dead shortly thereafter.

WHY THE HIGH RISK FOR FIREFIGHTERS?

As noted in the introduction, a heart attack is the main cause of death among firefighters while they are on duty. In fact, firefighters are at a higher risk of suffering a heart attack while on duty than any other occupation that involves a significant amount of physical exertion.

For the most part, the nature of the job is what contributes to the higher risk factor. Think about it: In response to an emergency, a firefighter can go from a state of deep sleep to a state of high alert in a matter of minutes. Furthermore, after arriving at the scene, a firefighter may be required to carry heavy equipment in a dangerous and hostile environment, surrounded by intense heat, while wearing 50 pounds or more of protective clothing.

Another reason that has been cited is shift work, which makes it more difficult for firefighters to adopt and sustain healthy habits. Finally, relatively few fire departments have a mandatory fitness program and/or fitness testing. As a result, many firefighters have little or no incentive to maintain an acceptable level of physical readiness.

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

There are a number of factors that can contribute to the risk of a heart attack and cardiovascular disease. Some risk factors can’t be modified. This includes: age (older individuals are at a higher risk than younger individuals), gender (men have a higher risk factor than women) and heredity (people with a history of heart attacks in their family are at a higher risk).

On the other hand, some risk factors can be modified. This includes: diabetes, high cholesterol, hypertension (high blood pressure), overweight/obesity, physical inactivity and smoking.

Two ways to modify these risk factors are through exercise and diet. (Here, and in the discussion that follows, the term “diet” simply refers to a normal food intake, not a specialized regimen of eating.)

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Exercising on a regular basis strengthens the heart and has a protective effect against heart disease. Additionally, exercise helps to lower the blood pressure and improves cholesterol levels. Exercising also uses calories, which is a key aspect of addressing overweight/obesity (this impacts as many as 88% of all firefighters). A comprehensive program of exercise includes: flexibility training, aerobic training, anaerobic training and strength training.

Eating a well-balanced diet plays a crucial part in the capacity to perform at optimal levels, as well as assisting in the improvement of strength and fitness. Eating foods that are low in fat – particularly

saturated fat and trans fat – and cholesterol can reduce the risk of heart disease. Also, eating foods that are low in sugar is an effective measure against the development of diabetes. Moreover, eating foods that are low in sodium helps to decrease blood pressure. Bottom line: You can reduce your risk of a heart attack while on duty – and off duty – by exercising regularly and eating wisely.

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TIPS TO PURCHASING A VEHICLE: (Continued from page 10)

Now, the big difference between that program and the nonsense that you hear from some of these dealers is that the government used our tax dollars to write the check to the dealerships for your clunker. Meanwhile, the dealers are using your money in their gimmicks by way of an inflated selling price.

I'm sorry to have to be the one to tell you this, but there are no free lunches in the world of car buying. There are only Jedi mind games (Sorry. There goes another Star Wars reference) played by these tricksters. Now, I've already told you the average profit on a mid-size vehicle and without jacking up that price there is no way for any dealer to pay you \$3,500 to \$5,500 or more than your vehicle is actually worth. Of course, that's not to say that you can't get a fair and/or high price for your vehicle, but you must always realize that it is a separate transaction. If you are trading in a vehicle, in effect you are selling your vehicle to the dealer and he is selling his vehicle to you. You should expect a fair price for your vehicle and a fair price for the vehicle you're purchasing.

However, there are many reasons why you should trade your vehicle in instead of selling it privately. One, you don't need complete strangers coming to your home and remembering where you live if something goes wrong with the vehicle down the road. But equally important is the savings that you will receive on the sales tax when you trade-in your vehicle. In layman's terms, the value of your vehicle is deducted from the selling price of the vehicle you are purchasing and you pay the sales tax only on the difference.

In closing, I hope that these tips help you when it's time for you to purchase a vehicle. In future articles I will detail the steps you can take to research your vehicle's trade-in value, so that you can expect a reasonable price. I'll also give you the pros and cons regarding paying cash for a vehicle, financing and leasing. Additionally, you'll learn how to determine the amount of the down payment you should or should not make toward your new vehicle. In the meantime, if you want answers to these, or any other questions, feel free to stop by any of our All American Ford locations in Old Bridge NJ, Hackensack NJ, Paramus NJ or Kingston, NY. We also welcome you to send us an e-mail at www.allamericanford.net.

LAST CALL AT NEW JERSEY FIREHOUSES: (Continued from page 17)

"But it's more than that," Kelley said. "We are hard-working adults. If we want to sit down and have a drink after a meeting or a call, it's our right.

"It's a benefit of being a volunteer firefighter that you have somewhere else to go, with people, besides a bar or a party," he added. "Besides, our bar is closed most days. It's usually open one day a week, when we have meetings. Very few people have keys to it.

"Those who say we shouldn't drink before going out on calls are right. That's why we DON'T do it," Kelly emphasized. "As for those

who say no alcohol at all, I'd be happy to give 'em my pager at 2 in the morning and have them handle a shift. Let 'em go out on calls and tell me how they feel afterward."

Or they could talk to him over a spiked eggnog at this year's borough Christmas Party. **It's being held at the firehouse.**

NJBBLUE NOW Editor Jerry DeMarco publishes and edits CLIFFVIEWPILOT.COM, a website that prominently features breaking police, crime and justice news. You can reach him at: GerardJDeMarco@gmail.com

