

Response to Questions on the FY 2010 County Lines of Business & Schools Program Review Processes Public Process - Fall 2008

Request By: Public

Question: What is the work performance test given to Fairfax County firefighters? What is the total cost and is the test required?

Response: Fairfax County Firefighter/Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) respond to emergency incidents that require extreme physical and psychological output. Firefighters must continually work on the physical and mental aspect of the profession during non-emergency response periods to ensure operational readiness. Over time, the response to emergency incidents can affect the overall wellness of firefighters and emergency response personnel. Heart attacks continue to be the leading cause of death among firefighters. Physical fitness and operational training are means to counteract this trend in firefighter deaths and protects the overall health and wellness of the Firefighter/EMT.

The Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department (FRD) recognizes the importance of keeping firefighters fit for duty and is one of ten organizations participating in the nationally recognized Wellness/Fitness Initiative that seeks to improve the wellness of firefighters. In addition to the benefits a fit, healthy, and capable firefighter provides to the public, the benefits are also seen through cost savings in lost work time, workers compensation, and disability.

The FRD has established a minimum level of acceptable physical performance that protects the safety of the firefighter and provides for the appropriate delivery of fire suppression and rescue services for the community. The Work Performance Evaluation (WPE) measures an individual's ability to physically perform essential functions required in the occupation of firefighting. FRD's Safety and Personnel Services Division developed the WPE, and Human Performance Systems, a company specializing in performance-based testing, validated the WPE.

FRD requires all uniformed personnel successfully complete the WPE annually to ensure all employees are operationally fit to safely and effectively perform their assigned job duties. FRD considers uniformed personnel who cannot complete the WPE non-operational until they demonstrate successful completion. The annual cost to administer the WPE is \$46,080.

Other programs the FRD has developed to promote wellness and fitness includes the Public Safety Occupational Health Center, the Candidates Physical Abilities Test (CPAT), and the peer fitness program.