
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
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Oct. 31, 2005

Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services

COMPENSATION ACT RECOGNIZES FIREFIGHTERS' CANCER RISK

VICTORIA – Changes to the Workers Compensation Act put B.C. among the leaders in recognizing the increased cancer risks faced by professional firefighters, Labour and Citizens' Services Minister Mike de Jong announced today.

De Jong has introduced legislation that recognizes certain cancers as occupational diseases associated with long-term employment as a firefighter. These are: primary site brain cancer, primary site bladder cancer, primary site kidney cancer, primary non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, primary site ureter cancer, primary site colorectal cancer and primary leukemia.

"The core of a workers' compensation system is that it must be responsive to workers' and employers' needs," de Jong said. "The contributions our firefighters make in communities all over B.C. should never be underestimated, and it's important we support them in every way we can."

The government informed WorkSafeBC (the Workers' Compensation Board) of its intent to legislate this amendment on April 11, 2005. This change to the Workers Compensation Act creates what is called a "rebuttable presumption." This means the onus will be on WorkSafeBC or the employer to bring forward proof to establish why an injured worker should not be eligible for compensation rather than placing the burden of proof on a sick firefighter.

"This is an important day for B.C.'s firefighters," said Al Leier, president of the B.C. Professional Fire Fighters' Association. "Having the risk of cancer recognized as one of the hazards of our job is welcome news."

Support has also been expressed by the Union of B.C. Municipalities, along with a number of municipalities, including Vancouver, Surrey, Richmond, Langley, Nanaimo, Prince Rupert and Kelowna.

Similar presumptions have been enacted for firefighters in Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia.

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1 backgrounder(s) attached.

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BACKGROUNDER

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Amendments to the Workers Compensation Act have been introduced to recognize the following cancers as diseases that can arise where a worker is employed full-time as a firefighter and has been regularly exposed to the hazards of a fire scene, other than a forest fire scene, over certain periods of time.

Primary site brain cancer	Employed for at least 10 years.
Primary site bladder cancer	Employed for at least 15 years.
Primary site kidney cancer	Employed for at least 20 years.
Primary non-Hodgkin's lymphoma	Employed for at least 20 years.
Primary leukemia	Employed for at least five years.
Primary site colorectal cancer	Employed for at least 20 years.
Primary site ureter cancer	Employed for at least 15 years.

The presumption will apply to qualifying firefighters who first became disabled from the cancer on or after April 11, 2005 – the date government gave notice to WorkSafeBC of its intent to introduce legislation.

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