

102 United States Firefighter Fatalities in 2002

This is a message from the Federal Emergency Management Agency/U.S. Fire Administration.

Release No. 03-005

Release Date: January 9, 2003

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EMMITSBURG, MD - The United States Fire Administration (USFA) announced today that 102 firefighters died while on-duty in the United States, in 2002. The loss of a firefighter's life was felt directly in more than 86 communities, in 35 states across the nation.

"The United States fire service and this nation have suffered another staggering loss of firefighters, in 2002. When the citizens of this nation need emergency services, they have come to rely on this nation's firefighters to be able to respond. The United States Fire Administration is committed to helping improve firefighter safety to prevent these tragedies from occurring in the future," United States Fire Administrator R. David Paulson said.

The severe wildfire season of 2002 led to a number of wildland firefighter deaths. In 2002, 20 firefighters died in wildland fire fighting incidents. Most of the firefighter fatalities related to wildland fires occurred in California and Colorado, where the fire season was especially severe. During the months of June, July, and August, 17 firefighters died in 8 wildland fire incidents. Six of these deaths were the result of 3 wildland fire fighting aircraft crashes. Five firefighters were killed as they traveled from Oregon to Colorado to fight a wildland fire when their van was involved in a crash and 3 California firefighters were killed when their fire truck left the roadway and rolled down an 800-foot hill.

Twenty-five firefighters died in 9 incidents where more than one firefighter was killed. Four wildland incidents (2 aircraft crashes and 2 vehicle crashes) described above took the lives of a total of 13 firefighters.

Two Central New York firefighters were killed when they became trapped in the basement of a burning house; 2 St. Louis firefighters died when they were trapped in the interior of a burning business; 3 New Jersey firefighters were killed when a burning residential structure collapsed as they searched the building for victims; and 3 Oregon firefighters were killed when they became trapped in the interior of a burning business

after a structural collapse. Two Florida firefighters were killed during a training exercise in July. There were 77 single firefighter fatality incidents.

Career firefighters, those who are employed full-time as firefighters, comprised 37 deaths (36%) in 2002. Volunteer, seasonal, and part-time firefighters accounted for 65 deaths. Ten of the 65 were seasonal or part-time wildland firefighters.

The vast majority of firefighter fatalities in 2002 occurred in relation to a fire or medical emergency incident. Seventy percent of the firefighters who died while on-duty in 2002 suffered fatal injuries or illnesses in emergency situations.

Fifteen firefighters died as they responded to an emergency or returned from one, many of these deaths involve vehicle collisions. Twelve deaths occurred during training.

Six firefighters died in separate incidents when they were struck by passing vehicles while working near roadways. Three of these firefighters were killed as they assisted on the scene of motor vehicle crashes, 1 on the scene of a vehicle fire, 1 on the scene of a wildland fire, and 1 during training.

Fifteen firefighters engaged in other fire department duties at the time of their death occurred in 2002. The 5 Oregon firefighters killed in a van crash in Colorado as they traveled there to assist in fire fighting efforts are included in this category.

Half of the firefighters that died on-duty in 2002 died of traumatic injuries. Eleven firefighters died of asphyxiation; 2 died of burns; 3 firefighters were crushed; 1 firefighter died of heat exhaustion; 1 firefighter drowned; and 36 died of traumatic injuries such those incurred in a vehicle crash. A fire chief in New Mexico was killed when he was shot while on the scene of a structure fire.

Heart attacks continue to be a leading cause of firefighter deaths, killing 31 firefighters in 2002. The 31 deaths represent almost one third of the 2002 total.

The largest loss of firefighter lives in a single incident occurred in Colorado. A group of firefighters were traveling from Oregon in a van that was involved in a single vehicle collision. The highest number of deaths occurred in July with 15 firefighter fatalities, October brought the fewest deaths with 3.

These fatality statistics for 2002 are provisional and subject to change as the USFA contacts State Fire Marshals at the beginning of each year to verify the names of firefighters reported to have died on-duty during the previous year and expects to have the annual fatality report completed by early June.

For additional information on firefighter fatalities including the annual fatality reports from 1986 through 2001 and the Firefighter Fatality Retrospective Study 1990-2000 please visit the USFA website:
http://www.usfa.fema.gov/dhtml/inside-usfa/ff_fat.cfm.