



Wildland Firefighter

Health & Safety



National Technology and Development Program

Topic: Rhabdomyolysis in Wildland Firefighters

Date: April 19, 2018

Background: In the profession of wildland firefighting, there has been a rise in the occurrence and awareness of exertional rhabdomyolysis (rhabdo), a serious medical condition. Rhabdomyolysis is the breakdown of muscle fibers in the human body. In wildland firefighters, we typically see cases of rhabdo during initial crew training periods. Below are some key points to remember, topics to discuss with your crew, and links to educational materials on rhabdo.

Key Points:

- Exercise, particularly when strenuous and unaccustomed, is a common factor in wildland firefighter rhabdo cases.
- Each case of rhabdo is unique in its causes, signs and symptoms, health consequences, and recovery.
- The prognosis depends on the extent and severity of rhabdomyolysis, as well as response time—early and prompt medical intervention is crucial.

Discussion Topics:

- Has your crew been training in the offseason under conditions that prepare them for how the crew will be training/performing once they come on? An individual may be a great runner and physically fit, but if he or she has not been carrying weight during training, the individual will be unaccustomed to this exercise.
- Have you talked to your crew about rhabdo? Do they feel comfortable telling you they have a problem?

Educational Materials:

- [NTDP Summary Report on Rhabdo in Wildland Fire](#)
- [Video on Rhabdo in Wildland Firefighters](#)
- [PT Rhabdo FLA](#)

