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J. SAM HURLEY
 DIRECTOR

CLINICAL BULLETIN			
Bulletin #	Title		Date Issued
#2020-04-03-01	Use of Structural Firefighting Gear and SCBA during a COVID-19 Response		3 Apr 2020
Superseded	Released By:	Source:	Pages
N/A	Maine EMS	Maine EMS, MFSI	2 Pages and Attachment
Approved By:	J. Sam Hurley, MPH, EMPS, NREMT Maine EMS Director	Matthew Sholl, MD, MPH State Medical Director	

Maine EMS recognizes the significant role of the fire service organizations which provide both EMS first response as well as treatment and transport services in the Maine EMS system. In the face of the current COVID-19 pandemic, the safety of all responders providing EMS services must be paramount in operations for the provision of EMS services. The current shortage of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) has presented challenges which all services are addressing as best they can, with many looking into different options and alternatives to use in place of PPE which may not be readily available on every COVID-19 incident.

The use of structural firefighting garments (or “turnout gear”) and self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) in lieu of PPE which has been specified in guidelines by the National and Maine CDCs, has been asked about in recent meetings with the MDPB and with Maine EMS. As a result, Maine EMS and the State Medical Directors have been worked with the Maine Fire Service Institute (MFSI) and their partners to develop a recommendation and guideline to address the issue. This has been developed using the most current NFPA standards regarding use, maintenance, cleaning and decontamination of the gear, manufacturer’s recommendations, and the most current guidelines from the National and Maine CDCs.

In accordance with the information and recommendation guidelines contained in the document “Structural Personal Protective Equipment & SCBA Use During COVID-19 Response,” which was developed by MFSI, Maine EMS, et al., Maine EMS *does not recommend the use of such equipment as a substitute for, or in lieu of the PPE which is recommended by National and Maine CDC guidelines.*

Fire services providing EMS first response or transport services who elect to use the gear on COVID-19 responses should be aware of the need to follow proper doffing, cleaning and decontamination procedures in order to reduce the risk of exposure to personnel. They should also be aware of the operational limitations posed by the process of proper gear decontamination

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and the need for an available supply of protective gear and/or clothing that is dedicated for use and decontamination, and re-use.

EMS and Fire Service personnel should refer to the attached document, for guidance and a list of appropriate resources. Any questions regarding this recommendation should be directed to Maine EMS.

Attachments:

Structural Personal Protective Equipment & SCBA Use During Covid-19 Response (April 2, 2020)



STRUCTURAL PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT & SCBA USE DURING COVID-19 RESPONSE

Image via CDC/Alissa Eckert, MS; Dan Higgins, MAMS

DOCUMENT SCOPE

This document reviews the usage of structural PPE and SCBA during known or potential SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19 patient interactions by Fire Department-based Emergency Medical Service agencies.

This document shall be considered as recommendations only, and not as a compliance directive or standard in any way, shape or format.

WHAT IS COVID-19?

A novel coronavirus is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified. The virus causing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), is not the same as the coronaviruses that commonly circulate among humans and cause mild illness, like the common cold.

SARS-CoV-2 is the name of the virus that causes the COVID-19 disease.

NFPA 1971 (Standard on Protective Ensembles for Structural Fire Fighting and Proximity Fire Fighting) section 5.2.1.1 clearly states that; THIS ELEMENT IS NOT INTENDED AS PART OF A HAZARDOUS MATERIALS PROTECTIVE ENSEMBLE.¹

The SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes the COVID-19 disease, is a biological element, thus meeting the definition of a hazardous material.²

Based on the afore-mentioned NFPA Standards, the use of Structural Fire Fighting PPE is to be considered as **an act of next to last resort** for protection from COVID-19. An act of last resort would be no protective clothing or garments at all.

If Firefighter PPE/SCBA is to be utilized during a potential response to a COVID-19 incident, Fire Department EMS providers are encouraged to **review the Owner's Guides** for their PPE and SCBA as it applies to acceptable use, limitations, and/or decontamination from a biological agent **PRIOR** to doing so.

In the event that Firefighter PPE/SCBA is utilized for a response, know that the protection provided via PPE is limited, and the PPE/SCBA must be disinfected post-use.³

Cleaning and disinfection of Firefighter PPE that is known to or suspected to have been exposed to SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19 **shall** be completed in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations **AND** within the guidelines and expertise received from hazardous materials teams, infection control specialists, verified independent service providers, or other individuals knowledgeable for the type of contaminant and how it can be removed from protective clothing and equipment.⁴

¹NFPA 1971:5.2.1.1

²NFPA 1994:3.3.1.1

³ <https://emergencyresponsetips.com/papers>

⁴NFPA 1851:7.5.4



STRUCTURAL PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT & SCBA USE during KNOWN / POTENTIAL COVID-19 PATIENT INTERACTIONS by FIRE DEPARTMENT-BASED EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES (continued)

Cleaning and disinfection of Firefighter SCBA that is known to or suspected to have been exposed to SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19 **shall** be completed in accordance with manufacturer's recommendations **AND** within the guidelines and expertise received from hazardous materials teams, infection control specialists, verified independent service providers, or other individuals knowledgeable for the type of contaminant and how it can be removed from protective clothing and equipment. Fire Departments are strongly encouraged to contact their SCBA manufacturer representatives for clear, up-to-date, manufacturer-specific guidance to help ensure any contamination is mitigated completely.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Strategies for Extending the Use Life of Respiratory Protection can also be found via:

<https://emergencyresponsetips.com/papers>

Guidelines for extended use/limited re-use of N-95 respirators can be found on the U.S. CDC website:

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/hcwcontrols/recommendedguidanceextuse.html>

SCBA and N-95 Respirator use still falls under Maine Department of Labor statutes. More information can be found online here:

<https://www.maine.gov/labor/docs/2020/covid19/PublicSectorN95FitTest.pdf>

The International Association of Fire Chiefs has shared Information & Tools for Fire Chiefs regarding COVID-19, accessible here:

<https://www.iafc.org/topics-and-tools/coronavirus-covid-19>

The International Association of Fire Fighters also has a webpage dedicated to COVID-19 news & resources:

<https://www.iaff.org/coronavirus/>

SUMMARY

In summary, and as noted by the IAFC, the primary use of firefighter PPE and/or SCBA for EMS responder protections in lieu of other more widely accepted practices only affords limited contact protection from the COVID – 19 virus, and does not guarantee the wearer of any protections.⁵ Further, when firefighter PPE / SCBA is potentially or confirmed to be contaminated with the COVID – 19 virus, this equipment is considered out of service for a period range between 24 hours and 14 days, depending on an infinite number of scenarios and based upon currently available disease control guidelines from many resources.

The Maine Fire Service Institute is a division of Southern Maine Community College located on their Midcoast campus in Brunswick, Maine. Our mission is to assist in the development of skills and abilities in support of Maine's Fire Service at the local, regional and state level in collaboration with the Fire Chiefs of Maine. This flyer was produced in collaboration with Maine EMS, Southern Maine Community College EMS Program, and the Maine Department of Labor / Bureau of Labor Standards.

⁵[COVID-19 PPE Decontamination Recommendations Quick-Reference](#)