

The Importance of Keeping our Cabs Clean

Article Submitted by OCFA Captain Jeff Hughes

It has been said that the technical definition of a “clean cab” is anything that goes into an Immediately Dangerous to Life or Health (IDLH) environment does not go back into the cab of the apparatus until it has been properly decontaminated. As firefighters, we realize that this is not always the case in working day to day on the job. However, it is a goal that we should strive for in order to reduce exposure to our apparatus, work locations, and ultimately to protect our health and the health of our families. Keeping fireground contaminants at the fireground is essential for our health and wellbeing.

The clean cab concept was initiated in south Florida and is now a standard for a well thought out fire apparatus design. It's important to understand that even legacy vehicles that were designed and delivered before a clean cab concept was developed is not a more dangerous or toxic piece of fire equipment. It just takes a little more engagement in understanding the differences and what needs to occur for the health and safety for our OCFA firefighters.

CLEAN CAB CONCEPTS

Apparatus should be designed with careful thought given to biological and chemical contamination and the potential for cross-contamination. The cab of the apparatus should be kept free of toxins, both in the hard and soft surfaces as well as in the air.

- SCBAs and turnouts should have their own compartment away from the cab. SCBAs that are designed into the seat should also come with provisions for decontamination and cleaning prior to being placed back into the seat after a fire.
- All seat material should be backed with vinyl or other material to reduce absorption of toxins and to make the area easier to clean.
- Apparatus can be adapted to have a warm water outlet, which provides a personal washing station. Prior to 2016, NFPA 1901 required a heat exchanger for the engine coolant. Most apparatus manufacturers accomplished this with water from the tank through a heat exchanger. A simple diverter valve to the pump panel can create a warm water outlet for a personal hand washing station.
- All flooring can be designed with non-porous waterproof material that can be washed with a hose and scrubbed out.
- Exhaust pipes can be designed to exit where firefighters are least directed when opening cabinets and accessing pump panel controls.

APPARATUS INTERIOR DESIGN

All interior material used in the cab should be easy to clean and designed to repel moisture. They must also be durable enough to be cleaned weekly with disinfecting agents, soap and water. Contaminated equipment (SCBAs, fire hose, TICs, etc.) should not be allowed in the cab of the apparatus until the equipment has been properly decontaminated. This may involve

arranging transportation for the contaminated equipment from the incident to the fire station for proper decontamination.

- As a **best practice**, groceries should not be transported in fire department apparatus due to potential cross-contamination. Because this is a common practice while working 24-hour shifts, a designated cooler or insulated zippered container can be used to minimize cross-contamination.

APPARATUS TURNOUT STORAGE

All apparatus should have a designated turnout compartment that is separate from the cab.

- Turnouts should not be routinely allowed in the cab of the apparatus with the exception of responding to emergencies or participating in trainings.
- No contaminated turnouts should be allowed in any passenger compartment.
- After an incident or training that involves contaminants, all turnouts should be grossly decontaminated on scene, encapsulated in a designated disposable bag and be transported to a fire station for proper cleaning.



Another example of a resistance to change...

By using common sense in our daily activities we can take a large step towards minimizing the risk of exposure to cancer causing materials and other dangerous substances.