



# Improving the FECA Claims Process for Federal Firefighters with Cancer, Heart and Lung Diseases

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Two weeks ago, the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs announced policy changes aimed at streamlining claims processing for federal firefighters with certain occupational illnesses.

## Background

Historically, firefighters faced challenges in establishing causation between cancers or occupational diseases they may develop through their unique past exposure to toxic, harmful substances during work duties.

Recent research suggests firefighters and other federal employees engaged in fire protection and suppression activities are at increased risk of certain cancers and heart and lung diseases.

## What We're Doing

To address this challenge, OWCP issued a policy bulletin on April 19, which announced changes in the Federal Employees' Compensation Program. FECA Bulletin No. 22-07 aims to ease the evidentiary requirements needed to support claims filed by federal employees engaged in fire protection and suppression activities for certain cancers, heart and lung conditions. Overall, these changes will help improve our service to federal firefighters and better develop and process their compensation claims.

Additionally, the bulletin announces OWCP's assignment of all these claims to a special-claims unit to ensure consistency in adjudicating federal firefighter claims. Staff in this unit will receive training that addresses the unique issues often found in these claims with its claims examiners undergoing comprehensive training regarding these policy changes.

Following this announcement, I joined Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh in El Monte, Calif., to discuss these policy and process changes with federal firefighters from the International Association of Fire Fighters and the National Federation of Federal Employees.

## Looking Ahead

During our conversation, I heard that active, structural and wildland federal firefighters were encouraged by the changes implemented at OWCP. Most importantly, Secretary Walsh and I learned more about the demanding work federal firefighters perform and the challenges they face when injured or ill because of that work.

Moving forward, OWCP will continue to monitor ongoing research on firefighter illnesses and exposures and update policy as needed. We plan to continue our partnership with firefighter stakeholders to ensure we learn more about this unique occupation. As OWCP's director, I am committed to making sure OWCP does everything within its authority to support the nation's federal firefighters.

**To read a factsheet on the “Special Case Handling in Certain Firefighter FECA Claims Processing and Adjudication” bulletin, [click here](#). To find the most up-to-date information on claims processing for federal firefighters, [click here](#).**

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**Tags:** International Association of Firefighters, firefighter, Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP), firefighter

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