

PTSD and the Fire Service

Firefighters are more likely to develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) compared to the general population due to their exposure to significant traumatic incidents incurred in the line of duty. The Trauma Stress Continuum spans the career of the firefighter and for some, the traumatic events can leave a heavy emotional shadow that is hard to overcome.

The fire service has worked collaboratively to create a law to care for first responders suffering from PTSD. October 1, 2018, the Florida legislature enacted Workers' Compensation Benefits for First Responders in section 112.1815 (5 and 6), Florida Statutes.

To further address this issue, the fire service vows to remove the previous barriers of the stigma that is associated with seeking mental health in the fire service. New training and education components have been developed for firefighters to recognize PTSD, to provide access to professional mental health professionals, and peer support counseling.

To recognize the struggle with PTSD in the fire service, a marker has been added at the Florida Fallen Firefighter Memorials to acknowledge the loss of lives gone too soon due to the tragic events regarding firefighter mental health. After consultation with mental health professionals, it was determined that the plaque should be devoid of specific names, departments or incidents. The Florida Joint Council of Fire and Emergency Services and the staff of the Florida State Fire Marshal made this decision after reviewing research in the field of PTSD and in consideration of what may be a sensitive issue for the family.

Links to PTSD Resources:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:
1-800-273-8255

Florida Firefighters Safety and Health Collaborative
<http://floridafirefightersafety.org>