

Wildland Firefighters: Burn Injury Guidelines for Care

SUMMARY

Wildland Firefighter Demographics:

- Male or female
- Primarily under 35 years of age
- They LOVE their job and want to return from an injury as soon as possible
- They often do not see home most of the fire season and are typically stationed in another state

OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS WHICH COULD RESULT IN IMPAIRED BURN WOUND HEALING AND POTENTIAL INFECTION:

- Dirty, dusty, smoky environment
- Extreme heat and sometimes cold environments
- Potential infection from contact with animals, plants and insects
- Lifting and carrying heavy loads (up to 85 lbs.) long distances
- Working in remote and isolated sites often at high altitude
- Extensive walking and climbing often on steep, uneven, rocky, loose or muddy terrain
- Long hours with limited and disrupted sleep
- Hunger and irregular meals, dehydration
- Extreme stress in rapid pull-out emergency situations whether fire, falling rocks, or falling trees
- Lack of a clean environment to change dressings

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR ED PROVIDERS:

- Most Wildland Firefighters do not have a Primary Care Provider at home nor in the state where they are working.
- A referral paper trail is important. If they are discharged from the ED with instructions to follow-up, please be as specific as possible. Have documented in the medical record who they are to follow up with, a Burn Center, Physical Therapy, or an orthopedist or surgeon at home. A specific name is not needed, but please do not put 'prn.'
- If local follow-up for a minor injury is needed, either the ED should set up that appointment with a community provider or have the follow-up performed in the ED itself.
- If burn injury follow-up is necessary beyond the ED, and no referrals are given from the ED, to qualify for Workers Compensation, the firefighter will then have to initiate the paperwork for benefits which can be a lengthy and time-consuming process.
- If the injured firefighter is not told specifically that they cannot return to the fire line, they will do so. Please give specific work restrictions, do not just state "light duty."