

**PLAINSBORO TOWNSHIP BOARD of FIRE COMMISSIONERS  
FIRE DISTRICT No. 1  
POLICY REGARDING PREGNANT FIREFIGHTERS**

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**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:**

The goal of the Plainsboro Board of Fire Commissioners, District No.1, is to ensure the safety of the public and our firefighters at all times.

Plainsboro Fire District No. 1 is fortunate to have a number of female firefighters among its rank. These firefighters have served with distinction and their continued bravery and contributions to the fire district are a source of pride for the entire community.

It is natural that there may come a time when a female firefighter will become pregnant. Due to the unusually strenuous and hazardous nature of firefighting, it is a reality that at some point during a pregnancy, due to medical and practical considerations, a firefighter will be unable to carry out the duties that are required to fight fires and the firefighter may have to withdraw from active firefighting duties. (See attached hereto a brief article by Melissa McDiarmid, M.D., which has been reprinted from a publication of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, United States Fire Administration Publication entitled "A Handbook on women in Firefighting: The Changing Face of the Fire Service.")

The goal of the Plainsboro Fire District No. 1 is to allow a pregnant firefighter to remain active within the fire district, but to give said firefighter the option to temporarily transfer to less hazardous duty. It is the recommendation of the Board of Fire Commissioners that a pregnant firefighter will limit her activity to non-hazardous duty within the department; however, this is merely a recommendation and not a directive.

To ensure the safety of the public, the firefighter herself, and her colleagues, the Board of Fire Commissioners adopts the following policy:

**NOTIFICATION:**

1. A firefighter, upon learning of her pregnancy, shall:
  - a. Immediately report her condition to the chief:
2. Upon being advised by the firefighter of her pregnancy, the chief shall report the matter to the Board of Fire Commissioners.

**FIREFIGHTERS OPTIONS:**

1. A pregnant firefighter shall have the following options regarding her duties during the course of her pregnancy:

- a. The firefighter shall be allowed to take a leave from her duties for the duration of her pregnancy and a reasonable time thereafter as health conditions dictate; or
- b. The firefighter shall be allowed to limit her activity to “non-hazardous” duties during the course of her pregnancy and reasonable time thereafter as health conditions dictate. “Non-hazardous” duties are those duties that do not pose any risk to the pregnant firefighter, including, but not limited to, training, public education, prevention, policy development and communications. “Non-hazardous” duties shall not include active participating in the fighting of fires or on-site inspections of fire scenes; or
- c. Continue firefighting,

2. If the firefighter chooses to continue active firefighting during the course of her pregnancy, she must provide the Fire District Commissioners with a written report from her treating physician certifying that she is able to continue with the strenuous and hazardous duties of firefighting. This requirement shall be the same as that for other non-duty related disabilities. Said certification must be made following every exam of the firefighter by the physician and shall be mailed directly to the Commissioners with a copy going to the firefighter. Said certification form shall be a standard form drafted by the Fire Commissioners and shall be available at the fire house. The Fire Commissioners retain the authority to transfer any pregnant firefighter who does not supply said certification from her doctor to “Non-hazardous” duty status.

### **SENIORITY-RANK AND BENEFITS**

1. Regardless of which option the pregnant firefighter chooses, during the course of her pregnancy she will maintain her seniority, rank and all other benefits as if on “regular active duty.” Furthermore, she shall not be passed up for any possible promotion due to her pregnancy.

IT IS NOT MANDATORY THAT A PREGNANT FIREFIGHTER CHOOSE TO TRANSFER TO NON-HAZARDOUS DUTY OR CONTINUE ON REGULAR ACTIVE DUTY IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN HER SENIORITY, RANK AND BENEFITS.

### **GRIEVANCES:**

1. If any firefighter is of the opinion that she is being discriminated against due to her pregnancy, she shall immediately report said incident and the matter shall be handled in accordance with the Plainsboro Fire District No. 1 policy on Sexual Discrimination/Harassment.

Medical consideration of firefighting and pregnancy:

The job of firefighting presents many potential hazards to healthy reproduction. It poses physical hazards such as drastic temperature variation, extreme and unpredictable physical exertion demands, and psychological stress. Firefighters may also be exposed to biological or radiation hazards. Additionally, the fire environment may produce a wide range of chemical agents, including irritant and asphyxiate gases and other toxins.

Human reproductive health as it is affected by the work environment is a relatively new area of study. The clearest connection between an environmental agent and adverse reproductive outcomes for both men and women is in the case of ionizing radiation, which is not a common hazard for most firefighters. Prolonged exposure to high ambient temperatures however, may also have a detrimental effect on fertility and pregnancy. High heat exposure has been related to infertility in men and may be linked to neural defects in babies of exposed mothers.

Chemical agents in the fire environment are numerous and unpredictable. The toxic effects of fire smoke have been tentatively linked to a number of physical problems, including respiratory diseases, coronary artery disease and malignancies. Many chemical agents in the fire environment may also adversely affect reproduction. Carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, hydrogen cyanide, acrolein and other aldehydes, sulfur dioxide, hydrogen chloride, nitrogen dioxide and benzene are all commonly produced in fire environments. Research shows that all of these compounds may have detrimental effects on reproduction. Pregnant women and their fetuses are especially affected by carbon monoxide exposures.

Although much more study is needed, existing research suggest that both men and women are vulnerable to reproductive toxicity in the firefighting environment. In addition, the potential hazards to developing fetuses pose special concerns for pregnant firefighters.

*Source: "Reproductive Hazards of Firefighting I and II" Melissa McDiarmid, M.D., et al., American Journal of Industrial Medicine. 19:433-472 (1921).*