May 1, 2023

Brothers and Sisters:

People become firefighters because they want to help people. Every time they button up their uniform and walk into the station, they become a beacon of hope for someone's darkest day, sometimes risking their own lives to save another. Repeated traumatic incidents they face on calls, as well as the sacrifice of time away from family, can take its toll on even the strongest firefighters and finds its way into every part of our lives.

For those answering the call, the increasingly heavy burden of the job can be difficult to discuss. Unaddressed occupational stress is too heavy a burden to carry alone and has taken the lives of our brothers and sisters on the front lines.

Too often, our brothers and sisters attempt to cope alone and struggle to work through their emotions. We must work together to address this issue directly with openness, compassion, and honesty. There are resources for support and treatment specifically for firefighters and first responders. The vast majority of firefighters who receive treatment for PTSI are able to get back on the job.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, we are calling on all California fire departments to participate in a Behavioral Health Suicide Prevention and Awareness Safety Stand Down.

During the week of May 22nd through the 26th, drills and activities should be canceled and replaced by kitchen table discussions with behavioral health and suicide awareness as the focus. Discuss the impact of the job, where to go for resources, and how to give and get help. We need to build up and strengthen our support networks now more than ever.

Enclosed is material to help you get these conversations started. You should have received a poster with resource information – please consider putting it up in a central location so the resources are visible. The California Fire Foundation has also included 12 wallet cards for firefighters at your station. If 12 is not enough, you may request more at no cost by emailing cafirefoundation@cpf.org. Additional tools, resources, and personal testimonies to help the discussion can be found at HealingOurOwn.org.

It’s time to create an environment where we can have these conversations and work together to create a resilient fire service. For you, your family, and your fire family, take the time next week to stand down for suicide awareness.

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