

# Reproductive Health & the Fire Service



## DANGERS OF THE JOB

- Toxic products of combustion: CO, PAHs, PFAS, etc.
- Certain chemicals and metals may be absorbed faster by pregnant women
- Some toxins more dangerous to the fetus than to the mother
- Circulation upregulated during pregnancy so the fetus is at increased risk
- Intense thermal environment
- Loud noises
- Psychological and physical strain
- Weight of full equipment: ~45-75 lbs
- Ill-fitting protective equipment
- Shift work
- Wide variation in pregnancy policies (30% of women reported their department had NO pregnancy/maternity leave policy)

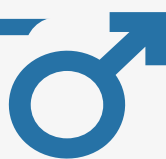
## Potential



## CONSEQUENCES

- **Infertility/reduced fertility**
  - Increased use of fertility drugs among women FFs (8.7% for first pregnancies to 15.0% for fourth pregnancies)<sup>1</sup>
  - Increased rates for adverse pregnancy, childbirth, and puerperium outcomes<sup>2</sup>
  - Exposure to heat may lead to delayed conception<sup>3</sup>
  - Increased rates of infertility among FFs (16%) compared to national average (6%)<sup>4</sup>
- **Menstrual/ovulatory cycle disorders**
  - Different phases of the menstrual cycle and oral contraceptive use can impact thermoregulation<sup>5</sup>
  - Shift work (including evening, night, or irregular shifts) can result in altered menstrual cycle length, increased menstrual pain, and changes in duration and amount of menstrual bleeding; can also result in changes in hormone secretion<sup>6</sup>
- **Sex-hormone imbalances**
  - Noise-exposed women were more likely to experience hormonal disturbances and idiopathic infertility than nonexposed controls<sup>3</sup>
- **Miscarriage**
  - Miscarriage rates among FFs 2.3 times higher compared to national average (29.1% vs 13.5%)<sup>1,4</sup>
  - Excessive bending/crouching associated with elevated risk of miscarriage<sup>7,8</sup>
  - Preliminary data shows miscarriage rates higher among volunteer than career FFs (volunteer FFs had 1.42 times the risk of miscarriage)<sup>4</sup>
  - Among wildland and WUI, volunteers 2.53 times more likely to have miscarriage than career FFs<sup>4</sup>
- **Stillbirth**
  - High ambient temperatures associated with shorter gestation periods and greater occurrence of stillbirth<sup>9,10,11</sup>
- **Birth defects**
  - Maternal hyperthermia associated with neural-tube defects during early pregnancy<sup>12</sup>
  - Exposure to carbon monoxide and high temperatures may increase the risk of birth defects<sup>13</sup>
- **Child developmental disorders**
  - Birth defects are a leading cause of infant mortality and developmental disabilities in the US<sup>15</sup>
  - Occupational exposure has been linked to a number of birth defects but **there is little literature examining developmental disorders of FF offspring**
- **Premature birth**
  - FFs had higher rates of pre-term birth compared to national average (11.6-16.7% vs 9.6%)<sup>1,4</sup>
  - Shiftwork has been connected to miscarriage and pre-term labor<sup>16</sup>
  - Among structural FFs, volunteers 1.47 times as likely to have preterm birth compared to career FFs<sup>4</sup>
  - Among wildland and WUI, volunteers 2.82 times more likely to experience preterm birth than career FFs<sup>4</sup>
  - Exposure to air pollution & non-occupational wildfire smoke during pregnancy associated with increased risk of pre-term birth<sup>17,18</sup>
- **Low birth-weight babies**
  - Loud noises may result in lower fetal weight and increased risk of fetal mortality<sup>19</sup>
- **Work Restriction**
  - Timing of when work restriction is started may influence risk<sup>4</sup>
  - Women who started restricting their work during the 2nd trimester appeared to have lower risk for preterm birth compared to women who started work restriction in the 3rd trimester or who didn't restrict work at all<sup>4</sup>

## Male Reproductive Health is Affected Too!



- Danish FFs had 46-53% increased risk of male-factor infertility compared to general workers<sup>20</sup>
- Male infertility 46-53% higher than general population<sup>20</sup>
- Paternal employment as a FF was associated with ventricular septal & atrial septal defects among offspring<sup>19</sup>
- Semen parameters (e.g., volume, sperm concentration, total sperm count, motility, normal forms) of FFs were lower than male fertility reference values published by the World Health Organization<sup>21</sup>
- Increased fire exposure is also associated with reduced sperm parameters<sup>21</sup>

## Solutions & Next Steps



- Check out NFPA 1582, Section 9.12, 2020 ed.
- Limit exposures with appropriate decontamination (see NFPA 1585)
- Take this guide and discuss options with your physician
- Know your department's policy or suggest adding one if there isn't one already

FOR MORE INFORMATION & REFERENCES,  
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