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2538 - **INCENTIVE BASED PHYSICAL FITNESS PROGRAM**

2538.1 The South Carolina Forestry Commission's Incentive Based Physical Fitness Program, hereafter referred to as "the Program", is designed to help ensure that fireline employees who perform direct fireline activities (wildland firefighting and/or prescribed burning) are physically able to perform their duties safely and efficiently. The job classifications required to perform fireline duties are Equipment Operator, Forestry Technician I,II,III (includes Forestry Tech/LE and Forestry Tech/Sup), Forestry Warden I, Project Forester, , Forester Sup.,Unit Forester, Assistant Regional Forester, State Forests Foresters, State Forests Directors, Investigators,and other designated personnel as defined in approved position descriptions.The Program as set forth in this Procedure will be incorporated into the position descriptions as an essential job duty for all fireline employees in the job classifications stated above. Employees who volunteer to assist with fireline duties must become eligible to do so by passing the basic fire school and any other required fire courses.

2538.2 **OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the Program are:

- A. To ensure the readiness of fireline employees to perform their jobs.
- B. To increase fireline employee's productivity.
- C. To increase physical fitness levels of fireline employees through a program of fitness and health education, evaluation, monitoring, and follow-up.

2538.3 **ADDITIONAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS**

The Program should also produce the following positive benefits to the fireline employees:

- A. Decreased medical costs due to fewer accidents and illnesses.
- B. Increased awareness of the importance of a healthy lifestyle to long-term health and happiness.
- C. Reduced risk factors for lifestyle-related conditions such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension, muscular skeletal problems, pulmonary disease, cancer, obesity, diabetes, depression, and other potential disabilities.
- D. Improved morale and self-concept.

2538.4 **JOB RELATEDNESS**

- A. **Readiness to Respond:** Fireline employees have a duty and an obligation to be ready to respond to situations threatening the public's safety and property. A physically fit fireline employee can go from rest to exertion, can sustain that exertion, and recover from it safely. Unfit fireline employees cannot perform their jobs as effectively or efficiently and in many wildfire and/or prescribed burning situations, unfit fireline employees are risks to themselves and to anyone they are protecting or with whom they are working.
- B. **Survivability:** Trauma patients who are physically fit, have a higher probability of surviving any type of physical trauma. Heart attack victims who are physically fit have a greater survival rate than unfit people if they do develop cardiovascular disease.
- C. **Fatigue Resistance and Accident Prevention:** One's tolerance to fatigue increases with physical fitness level. Physically fit people do not get as tired, and can work harder and longer than unfit people. As a consequence, the incidence of accidents and injuries decreases as fitness increases. Many accidents occur when people become fatigued and lose alertness.

- D. **Response Options:** In a confrontation situation, an unfit fireline employee's options are limited. The fit fireline employee has a broader response repertoire because of greater stamina, strength, and flexibility.
- E. **Endurance:** Many fireline tasks require sustained heavy activity. High degrees of muscular and cardio-respiratory endurance are necessary.
- F. **Stress Management:** As one becomes more fit, one's physiological mechanisms for managing and handling stress are enhanced. This is critical in fireline duties.
- G. **Productivity:** A healthy, fit employee gets a fireline job done more quickly, which means before more lives and property are destroyed.

2538.5

HEALTH ASSESSMENT

EMPLOYEES SHOULD NOT BEGIN NEW PHYSICAL FITNESS PROGRAMS WITHOUT ADVICE FROM THEIR OWN QUALIFIED MEDICAL PROVIDER.

- A. Health History Questionnaires will be provided to all fireline employees along with self-addressed, stamped envelopes which must be completed and mailed to the South Carolina Forestry Commission designated health screening facility annually by the date designated by the agency.
- B. Fireline employees will be required to obtain blood pressure and pulse readings (this can be done at most drug stores) and enter this information as well as other requested information on the Health History Questionnaire.
- C. Based on the information provided in the Health History Questionnaire, medical staff at the health screening facility will determine whether the employee is cleared to participate in the physical fitness testing or whether the employee is required to obtain medical clearance from a qualified medical provider to participate in the physical fitness testing.
- D. The South Carolina Forestry Commission will pay up to \$64.00 to any qualified medical provider for employees required to obtain the medical clearance. This amount may be increased over time as necessary.
- E. The only information the South Carolina Forestry Commission will receive regarding the medical clearance is whether or not the employee is cleared to participate in the physical fitness test and perform fireline duties.
- F. The Health History Questionnaires will remain at the health screening facility and will not be available to South Carolina Forestry Commission personnel.

2538.55 Medical Exemption

- A. Any fireline employee may choose to be exempt from the moderate level walk by having a qualified medical provider complete form 2538-5.
- B. Form 2538-5 must be completed annually and turned into the Safety/ Training Director at least 2 weeks before the first scheduled walk.
- C. It is the employee's responsibility to pay for any associated costs to get the form completed.
- D. The SCFC reserves the right to send an employee for a second opinion to a medical provider of its choice. Any costs associated with this will be paid by the SCFC. The employee agrees to comply with this request before being exempt from the walk.
- E. Fireline employees hired after 3/10/11 will be required to pass the walk as a condition of employment before they are eligible for the medical exemption.
- F. A medical exemption cannot be used as a means to become fireline qualified after an employee has failed to pass a test within a calendar year.
- G. Employees who choose to be exempt from the moderate level walk by completing form 2538-5 are still eligible for out of state assignments under the Southeastern Forest Fire Protection Compact.

- H. Employees who choose to be exempt from the moderate level walk by completing form 2538-5 can maintain state-level ICS qualifications but will not be issued a NWCG Incident Qualification Card (Red Card) for any ICS positions that require moderate level fitness. Only employees that pass the appropriate level work capacity test will receive a Red Card for use on national assignments.

2538.6 PHYSICAL FITNESS TEST

All fireline employees will be required to participate in the Moderate Level Work Capacity Test annually (unless exempted as outlined in 2538.55). The walks will normally be scheduled for February but may be scheduled at other times when deemed necessary. The test was developed for the U.S. Forest Service for wildland firefighters. The test measures aerobic capacity, muscular strength, and muscular endurance. The test requires a 2 mile walk with a 25 pound pack in 30 minutes or less.

All fireline employees hired PRIOR TO 7-1-04 must participate in the walks and are encouraged to walk the full distance without stopping and to make every effort to do so within the required time.

All fireline employees hired AFTER 7-1-04 must pass the test as a condition of employment, and must continue to pass all future tests as a continuing condition of employment. Passing means completing the 2 mile walk while carrying the 25 pounds within 30 minutes.

Fireline employees who are unable to obtain medical clearance to take the test after seeing a Qualified Medical Provider will be placed on sick leave. Agency Leave Procedures outlined in Chapter 2516 will be followed in such cases. In extenuating or extraordinary circumstances, the State Forester has the option of reviewing cases and taking other actions which may be appropriate in accordance with State Human Resources Regulations. In cases of documented temporary medical problems, employees whose fireline duties are shown as 10% or less on their position description may be temporarily relieved of fireline duties and participation in the Program for up to six months.

2538.7 - NON-PASSAGE OF PHYSICAL FITNESS TESTS FOR FIRELINE EMPLOYEES HIRED AFTER 7/1/04

- A. Fireline employees hired after 7/1/04 who are medically cleared to take the tests but do not pass will be removed temporarily from their positions. In most cases they will not be eligible to use accumulated sick leave but may use a combination of annual leave and leave without pay for a maximum of six months. Arrangements will be made for testing or re-testing, as determined by the agency and those employees on such leaves of absence who pass the required test will be returned to active duty.
- B. Fireline employees on such leaves of absence may apply for permanent reassignment to posted South Carolina Forestry Commission job vacancies and will be considered for them.
- C. Fireline employees hired after 7/1/04 on such leaves of absence who, after six months in such status, have not been returned to active duty in their regular positions or transferred to some other South Carolina Forestry Commission position will be terminated from employment.
- D. Fireline employees hired after 7/1/04 with at least one year of service, who are terminated from employment as a result of the Program have the right to file a grievance in accordance with the Forestry Commission's Employee Grievance and Appeal Procedure outlined in Chapter 2517 of the South Carolina Forestry Commission's Procedure Manual.

- 2538.8 Fireline employees are authorized 2.5 hours per week to exercise on Agency time. This must be coordinated with the employee's supervisor.

2538.9 ARDUOUS LEVEL TESTING

- A. The South Carolina Forestry Commission recognizes many employees train for and pass the Arduous Level Work Capacity Test
- B. The Arduous Level Work Capacity Test consists of walking 3 miles in 45 minutes while carrying a 45 pound pack.
- C. Passing the Arduous Level Work Capacity Test along with the proper training will qualify South Carolina Forestry Commission employees for assignments requiring the arduous level of physical fitness.
- D. Physical fitness testing for the arduous level requires medical clearance from a qualified medical provider per Form 2538-4. The Forestry Commission will pay up to \$64.00 to any qualified medical provider for employees seeking this clearance. This amount may be increased over time as necessary.
- E. South Carolina Forestry Commission employees who pass the Arduous Level Work Capacity Test will be subject to call for details that require arduous level fitness.
- F. Passing the Arduous Level Work Capacity Test will exempt the employee from participating in the moderate level test for that year..

2538.10 PHYSICAL FITNESS TESTS INCENTIVES

- A. Each year, eligible fireline employees who pass and/or complete a walk test will be eligible for a bonus as determined by the State Forester.
- B. The awarding of and the amounts of bonuses will be set forth each year and will be subject to funding availability.
- C. Eligibility for bonuses also requires successful completion of Basic Fire School, which includes courses 190 & 130) and course 211.