

Federal Firefighters Fairness Act of 2022 (H.R. 2499)

Improving access to workers' compensation benefits for federal firefighters

Firefighters are at a greater risk from occupational illnesses because of hazards associated with their work.

Firefighters are routinely [exposed to occupational hazards](#) ranging from diesel emissions to carbon monoxide to cancer-causing chemicals released during fires. Due to their daily exposure to stress, smoke, heat, and various toxic substances, firefighters are far more likely than other workers to [contract certain illnesses](#), such as lung, brain, and digestive cancers, and non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

Federal firefighters face challenges qualifying for workers' compensation benefits for work-related illnesses.

The *Federal Employees' Compensation Act* (FECA) provides wage-loss compensation, medical treatment, return-to-work assistance, and vocational rehabilitation to civilian federal employees who are injured, made ill, or killed by work-related hazards. Like most workers' compensation systems, FECA is well designed to address traumatic injuries, but is poorly designed to provide benefits for occupational disease caused by exposure to toxic substances. Federal firefighters who have contracted cancers face difficulty proving illnesses are work-related because of the lack of data to prove the disease is linked to specific incidents or exposures.

Workers' compensation laws in [49 states](#), by contrast, provide firefighters with a presumption that certain diseases are work-related. However, no such law covers the approximately 15,000 firefighters employed by the federal government. Federal firefighters deserve the same protections as those employed by state and local governments.

The Federal Firefighters Fairness Act of 2022 improves access to injury and illness benefits for federal firefighters.

The *Federal Firefighters Fairness Act of 2022* amends FECA to ensure that the federal government stands behind federal firefighters who risk their lives to protect all Americans. The legislation:

- Establishes an initial science-based list of diseases for which an automatic presumption of work-related illness would apply, provided the firefighter is employed in fire protection activities for five years. The initial list includes:
 - Bladder cancer,
 - Brain cancer,
 - Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease,
 - Colorectal cancer,
 - Esophageal cancer,
 - Kidney cancer
 - Leukemias,
 - Lung cancer,

- Mesothelioma,
 - Multiple myeloma,
 - Non-Hodgkin lymphoma,
 - Prostate cancer,
 - Skin cancer (melanoma),
 - Testicular cancer,
 - Thyroid cancer, and
 - Sudden cardiac event or stroke not later than 24 hours after working in fire protection activities.
- Requires the Secretary of Labor to evaluate the latest science on breast cancer risks for firefighters and determine within 3 years of passage of the Act whether breast cancer should be added to the list.
 - Enables any person to propose additions to the initial disease list. The Secretary of Labor would be directed to review and authorized to add additional diseases to the list if the science demonstrates that there is a significant risk to employees in fire protection activities of developing the disease.
 - Directs the Secretary to inform any federal firefighter submitting a FECA claim about the opportunity to participate in the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's National Firefighter Registry Program, which will further develop scientific understanding of the unique health risks firefighters face.

The legislation is endorsed by: [International Association of Fire Chiefs](#), [International Association of Fire Fighters](#), and [American Federation of Government Employees \(AFGE\)](#).

This legislation enjoys bipartisan support with 135 Democratic and 15 Republican cosponsors.