

Employee Fact Sheet  
Interagency Wildland Firefighter Medical Qualification Standards Program  
(MSP)

**Let's talk Basics!**

**Who does the MSP apply to?**

Any employee, permanent or temporary, performing arduous wildland firefighting duties, including the militia.

**Why did we start down this path three years ago?**

The National Fire and Aviation Executive Board authorized an interagency team to address a common perception that the present physical examination processes for employees who participate in arduous wildland fire fighting duties are not adequate. The Forest Service concluded that the perception was correct and the current physical examination process was inadequate.

**How were the Medical standards developed?**

Medical standards were developed and validated by on-site visits to wildland and prescribed fire operations by a team of subject matter experts representing the Forest Service, Department of the Interior, Office of Personnel Management, and Federal Occupational Health.

**What are the Standards?**

There are a number of wildland firefighter medical standards developed to establish the levels of minimum medical fitness to safely and efficiently perform arduous duty wildland firefighting. Standards are posted on the website at:

[http://www.nifc.gov/medical\\_standards/](http://www.nifc.gov/medical_standards/)

**When?**

Region 6 began piloting the program in FY 2003. It has now been approved for national implementation beginning in FY2006.

**Where?**

It is being phased in to the locations as follows:

FY 2006: Regions 1, 2, 10 (Region 6 is fully implemented.)

FY 2007: Regions 8, 9

FY 2008: Regions 3, 4

FY 2009: Region 5

**More Whats!**

**What are my Responsibilities?**

Exam Forms will be provided either by the FMO (current employees) or the Human Resources Office (new hires, including temporary new hires). The nationwide medical provider is Comprehensive Health Services (CHS). CHS will contract with clinics throughout the country; CHS will work with you to schedule your appointment.

Fill out the exam form completely. When you answer “yes” include everything you can remember (e.g. type of injury, dates of surgery in mm/yy format, outcome, diagnosis, prognosis). Insufficient information leads to further evaluation letters which means delays in a clearance determination.

Sign the exam form. Failure to sign results in delays in a clearance determination.

Within 5 days of the Forest Service requesting the exam, CHS will contact you. It is very important that if you receive a voice mail from CHS, you return their call immediately. If you get the CHS voicemail, leave a message which contains the CHS scheduler’s name, your name, SSN, date of birth, a phone number where you can be reached and that you are trying to schedule an appointment with the Wildland Firefighter program.

Show up for the medical exam or screening as determined below:

Baseline Exam (initial)

Permanent: First exam under program or new hire

Periodic Exam

Permanent: Every 5 years if under 45 years of age; every 3 years if over 45 years of age

Temporary/AD: Every 3 years if over 45 years of age

Annual Medical Screen

Permanent and temporaries over 45 years of age: Given on years that no periodic exam is scheduled

Temporary: Every year if under 45 years of age

Exit Exam

Permanent: Upon end of employee’s employment as arduous firefighter.

The above exams will be paid for by the Forest Service; if in the course of the exam, a medical condition becomes apparent, responsibility for payment of any additional medical exam expenses may shift to employee/applicant from management.

If you think a clinic performed an exam test incorrectly, immediately contact the CHS Client Services Administrator at 800-638-8083.

The TB test requires you to return for a reading 48-72 hours after the exam; you will have delays in clearance determination if you do not get the test read.

There is additional information pertaining to the exam in the Q&A section on the Federal Interagency Wildland Firefighter website: [http://www.nifc.gov/medical\\_standards/faqs.htm](http://www.nifc.gov/medical_standards/faqs.htm)

**What do I do if I receive a further evaluation letter and therefore placed in Pending Status?**

First of all, you may be able to avoid this. If you know that you may have an existing medical condition, get your medical history/documentation from your physician and take it with you when you go for the exam. Request the clinic to forward your existing medical history/documentation to CHS with your exam paperwork. This may eliminate requiring additional information.

If it's new "news" to you, obtain the additional information requested from the "further evaluation" letter received from CHS and submit it as requested. The quicker your reaction time, the sooner the case can be reviewed and a clearance decision made.

### **What is a Courtesy Letter? What do I do if I get one?**

First of all, you need not do anything as you are cleared for duty. You will receive a Courtesy Letter from CHS if a medical issue(s) popped up during the exam that you may want to discuss with your physician. Again, CHS must disclose anything to you they find during the normal exam process. The Courtesy Letter will be clearly titled as such.

Note: CHS does not prescribe treatment and cannot require an employee to obtain further testing, though they must disclose anything they find during the normal exam process. It's all up to you as to whether you proceed.

### **What do I do if I am found to not meet a medical standard(s)?**

According to 5CFR339, agencies MUST waive a medical standard or physical requirement when there is sufficient evidence that an applicant or employee, with or without reasonable accommodation, can perform the essential duties of the position without endangering the health and safety of themselves or others.

So, the first thing you should do is get any additional information that will help management make an informed decision. Is there additional medical documentation from your personal physician or practitioner? If you have been performing arduous duty for years and can show that you have ample firefighting experience that eliminates or mitigates the danger of your medical condition to yourself and others, share it also. The responsibility is on you to show you can perform the essential duties of the position without endangering the health and safety of yourself or others.

To date, less than 3% of employees/selectees have been identified as not meeting a standard; only in one case submitted was the Forest Service unable to provide a waiver.

### **After I have done what I can do, what actions will be taken if I still cannot meet a medical standard?**

Generally, the unit will attempt to reassign you to a position covered by FF Retirement. If this cannot be done, other options might include: 1) a directed reassignment to a position covered by FF Retirement (desired) or a position not covered; 2) optional retirement; 3) voluntary disability retirement 4) Adverse Action (change to lower grade removal); 5) Agency initiated disability

### **What you don't want to do?**

- Refuse a medical exam; this is grounds for disciplinary or adverse action procedures if you are hired for an arduous duty fire position.
- Remain silent in the event of a bad experience with a clinic. Employees have the opportunity and responsibility to report bad experiences for upper level review. This will assist in establishing trends sufficient to remove the clinic from the provider list and to provide rationale to avoid having to return to the clinic/provider. On the website, in the "What's New" section, there is a survey for you to complete addressing your experience with the clinic.
- Ignore the "Further Evaluation" Letter from CHS unless you choose not to proceed (militia).

- Dilly dally around! If you act like a snail in taking the exam and compiling additional information if needed, it will take longer for you to get cleared for arduous duty.

### **What are the differences between physical requirements and medical standards?**

In the past, you completed an HSQ which determined whether a medical examination was required prior to taking the Work Capacity Test (WCT). The WCT is a physical requirement. It demonstrates that you can physically meet the challenges of the position. The medical exam determined whether you could take the WCT not whether you were medically fit to perform the duties of the position.

Medical standards provide the basis for meeting the medical requirements of a arduous duty firefighter based on a determination that a level of health status is required for safe and efficient performance.

The primary difference is that without medical standards, you may be physically fit to perform the job, but may not be medically able to safely perform the duties of the position.