



When to Replace Fire Turnout Gear

Frequently Asked Question

February 2012

How often must Fire Departments replace structural firefighting turnout gear?

This question has been frequently asked since National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1851, Standard on Selection, Care, and Maintenance of Protective Ensembles for Structural Fire Fighting and Proximity Firefighting, 2008 edition, was published. Chapter 4 requires fire departments to develop criteria for the removal of protective clothing from service in accordance with Chapter 10. Chapter 10.1.1 states the retirement criteria should be based on several factors such as overall condition, specific deterioration of materials or components and age. Chapter 10.1.2 adds “structural firefighting ensembles shall be retired no more than 10 years from the date of manufacture”.

Furthermore, literature accompanying newly purchased protective gear also cites NFPA 1851-2008 and the 10 year lifespan of their gear.

To answer this question, the Safety Director’s office contacted the Division of Fire Safety and the Department of Labor, Office of Public Employee’s Occupational Safety and Health. New Jersey has promulgated N.J.A.C. 12:100 which adopts specific NFPA editions and Standards. For example, 12:100-10.7 for Protective Clothing; Body Protection references NFPA 1971-1986 while 12:100-10.9 for helmets references NFPA 1972-1987. These editions of the NFPA Standards do not contain the same 10 year lifespan verbiage. NJPEOSH enforces N.J.A.C. 12:100 and not NFPA 1851-2008. **New Jersey’s fire departments have not been cited for not replacing firefighting turnout gear based on being over 10 years old.**

Inspectors evaluate turnout gear on a case-by-case basis by visually inspecting the general condition, discoloration, flame damage, and more. In addition, a field test may be performed which entails stretching the material of the turnout ensemble and seeing if it rips which would indicate a severe deterioration of its integrity.

The Safety Director reminds fire departments of the need to have a written program for the inspection, maintenance, repair, and eventual retirement of protective equipment. Gear must be formally inspected at least yearly. More often is recommended, depending on use. Fire departments do not need to have specially trained, or certified, inspectors. However, having such trained inspectors adds a level of confidence and credibility to the program. Each fire department must evaluate when to repair or replace damaged or deteriorated turnout gear. Comparing the cost of repair, versus the cost of replacement, including the age of gear should be the deciding factor for fire officers or commissioners.

Firefighters should be expected to inspect their own gear after each use. There should a written procedure for reporting and correcting deficiencies. The program should also include criteria for cleaning gear. Turnout gear can contain combustible contaminants that would present an additional and unnecessary hazard to interior firefighters. Be sure to follow manufacturers’ instructions. Improper cleaning can decrease the fire protection of the material.