

# AVFD Fitness Program Elements

## Vision

### Fitness in the Fire Service – It's About Preparedness, Community Service, and Volunteerism

Service in the volunteer fire department always has an impact upon one's family, primary occupation, and community, and most often that impact is a positive one. Unhealthy lifestyle and fitness choices, however, jeopardize each, as injuries and illnesses sustained in the line of duty can affect each as well. Active participation in fire department health and wellness initiatives maximize longevity and minimize disability not only in the fire service, but in our primary occupation and in the lives of our families, and indeed maximize our effectiveness as public servants, and our ability to pursue our own happiness injury and illness-free.

The AVFD fitness program mission is to sow and grow a permanent culture of physical and mental readiness, **to promote the philosophy of the occupational athlete in every volunteer**, and to motivate each member to a lifetime of healthy habits for themselves and their loved ones. Firefighters nationwide lead the citizenry in many things – among these are valor, courage, humanitarianism, but unfortunately also in rates of obesity, death from sudden heart attack, and cancer rates that exceed those of the general population. The fact that these are preventable conditions makes this mission all the more urgent. We firefighters, the members who support us, the families who count on us to come home after every call alive and well, and the citizens who depend on us to answer the call every time with skill and determination, deserve nothing less than our full commitment to total readiness.

The leadership of the AVFD has decided to demonstrate its commitment to these ideals by prioritizing member fitness among its most important endeavors, for without healthy, ready, professional operators our mission as a whole is incomplete and at greater risk for failure.

Essential components of a total Wellness and Fitness Program include: recruit and incumbent member physical examinations, annual skills assessment, quarterly fitness assessments, ongoing skills training, ongoing fitness training, lifestyle modification including healthy eating habits, tobacco cessation, blood pressure and blood sugar control, continuous recruiting and retention efforts aimed at fitness-minded individuals to balance retirements, maintenance and availability of exercise equipment and peer fitness trainers.

Having a robust physical fitness program reflects on the attitudes and priorities of the organization. A visibly supported wellness program tells potential recruits that they are valued as a resource and that their efforts are worth investing in. Just as how a member wears his uniform and gear in the public eye reflects on the culture and professionalism of the organization, so does the fitness and attitude of the individual carry a similar message about himself and his peers. When a community admires the professionalism and discipline of its organizations, it is more likely to support them as members and donors. Potential recruits are more willing to be associated with an organization that values its members, and with whose members value their own well-being.

## **Key Concepts Driving the AVFD Wellness and Fitness Initiative**

The driver for incorporating a fire department fitness program is statistical – heart attack continues to kill young and seasoned firefighters alike in a way that would seem preventable, predictable, and out of proportion to the general population; cancer also affects firefighters disproportionately among the general population, which also appears to be preventable through changes in departmental work practices.

The single biggest problem facing the volunteer fire service is low responder turnout. Having a small number of responders per call puts stress and burden on those who do respond, increases the risk of making unsafe tactical decisions, and decreases a department's ability to adequately accomplish its mission. Increasing AVFD responder turnout has to be among the department's top priorities, and this initiative is poised to be a key component in recruiting, retention, and improved responder turnout.

To address these issues, in part, the 16 Firefighting Life Safety Initiatives championed by the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation places a particular emphasis on fitness, wellness, training, and procedure modification.

To maximize effectiveness during the implementation period, our program is to consider, incorporate, and motivate lifestyle change as a means of improving member fitness and preparedness by emphasizing benefits that extend beyond the fire service. By improving blood pressure, glycemic control and diabetic management, and cholesterol levels, decreasing excess weight, eliminating tobacco use, moderating alcohol use, improving tolerance of exertion and stress response, and decreasing risk of injury from musculoskeletal strain and preventable injury, it is reasonable to conclude, and likely, that our members would decrease lifetime medical expenses, decrease life insurance rates, maximize family life participation and enjoyment, and decrease lost productivity and income due to illness and injury.

## **Methods**

**The fitness program is to be supportive, never punitive** – with recruiting and retention so key to a volunteer department's success, the goal of any fitness program should never be to remove members from duty, but to help every member be the best-prepared and most effective responder he or she can be.

**The fitness program is to provide feedback to members** to assist them in deciding the best way to reach their program goals.

**“The Occupational Athlete” - The fitness program is to help motivate members toward an athletic philosophical approach to firefighting**, to challenge traditional philosophies and attitudes that impede wellness, and to embrace a new paradigm of health and preparedness.

**Peer Fitness Trainers and the HFC** will assist members in setting reasonable and achievable program benchmarks and goals.

## **Program Goals**

- Maintain and support heart-healthy lifestyle and condition of fit members
- Motivate and support less fit members toward peak conditioning
- Increase force productivity and longevity, and minimize disability
- Increase operational membership numbers and responders per call

## **WFI Implementation and Facilitation**

As part of the WFI, AVFD may provide access to certain resources and/or equipment to help members reach and maintain their goals, but in all cases, members are individually responsible for maintaining themselves in a ready state for their duty assignment. At no time shall AVFD establish any particular fitness activity as a condition of service or membership. This is differentiated, however, from the essential job tasks which all operational members are expected to be able to perform as a condition of Active Duty status.

The WFI is not to be viewed or administered under any circumstance as a mechanism for removal of any member from the line of duty, either temporarily or permanently, but as a proactive structured program to help motivate individuals toward self-determined physical conditioning and healthy lifestyle choices.

The program is not punitive in nature, but is intended to assist members in achieving their fitness goals by providing monitoring, guidance, support and education

## **AVFD-Supported Gym Facilities**

### **PD Gym**

AVFD Members are welcome to use the facilities maintained by the Avon Police Department for the physical training of their officers. The facilities and equipment are located in Building 8 just north of the police headquarters building on the property of the Town offices at 60 West Main Street. The building is accessible 24 hours, and is unstaffed. A liability waiver must be completed and filed in police dispatch prior to the first use. AVFD supports the facility by periodically donating equipment for use by authorized personnel. There is no charge to use this facility. Facility use is limited to fire department members only; family members and friends are not permitted in the facility.

### **Healthtrax - Avon**

AVFD has negotiated a discounted membership rate program with Healthtrax, which is available to all AVFD members. Physical training is as essential to firefighter readiness as is firefighting skills training, and the services and equipment provided by Healthtrax can help our members achieve and maintain their fitness goals conveniently, and with a variety and availability unmatched in the local area. All members are encouraged to take advantage of this member benefit. Discounted rates are available for family members as well, as part of this program.

### **Health and Fitness Coordinator**

The HFC serves as the administrator of the health and fitness program, and will oversee the day-to-day operation and make sure that the program does not wither or become neglected.

### **Peer Fitness Trainers – “Encourage, Support, Coach, Counsel”**

Peer fitness trainers are fire service personnel specifically trained to assist other fire department personnel in setting and achieving their fitness goals safely and effectively as part of a structured health and wellness program. Among their many responsibilities, PFT's are accessible as a resource for our members who have questions regarding their fitness and exercise routines, and injury prevention during exercise. The PFT is to be the "buddy" that helps fitness partnerships succeed. The PFT works under the direction of the health and fitness coordinator, or may assume that role if necessary. The PFT may perform individual exercise revisions and coaching. This is a valuable resource for the promotion of preventative and corrective exercises, as well as for those members who have recently returned to work from an injury and may benefit from some continued supervision during exercise.

### **DriveTrain Athletics**

AVFD coordinates with DriveTrain Athletics, a health and wellness organization based in Granby, CT, to help administer the physical training program of the fire department. DriveTrain's philosophy of instituting lifestyle modification and organizational culture change by focusing on the factors that drive and support personal motivation and achievable goals matches perfectly with the objectives of fire service health and wellness initiatives. Program offerings include weekly group fitness activities, monthly "Truck Challenge" activities, periodic education sessions, personal coaching, and an online community FF365 to maintain communication and motivation among members in a protected and confidential environment.