

Health of wildland firefighters working to contain the Horse River fire of 2016

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Who is doing the study? This study is being carried out by investigators at the University of Alberta

Why are we doing the study? This study is being conducted to determine whether or not exposures during the wildland-urban interface fire in Fort McMurray resulted in any immediate health problems, and to monitor the health of workers to see if there are any changes to health over the long term.

Why have I been chosen? Any wildland firefighter who was engaged in containing the Horse River fire between May 1st and June 30th is eligible to join the study.

What would I have to do if I took part? We would ask you first to read then sign the on-line form consenting to fill in an exposure and health questionnaire. The questionnaire asks about your tasks and exposures while you were containing this fire and about your health now and in the past. We will also ask for your consent to follow-up your health through provincial administrative health databases. This will help us to identify whether there are any longer term impacts on the health of those fighting the Horse River fire. We will not see your full medical record, only basic information about dates and times of any health services provided to you. We then ask for your consent to access your history of fire action from the Wildfire Management Branch in order to help us understand your past exposures. Finally we will ask for your consent to contact you again as part of studies of wildland firefighters that are planned going forward. For this it would be most helpful to have an email address and phone number where we can contact you.

What about confidentiality? The results will be confidential to the University team and your individual results will not be shared with your employer or with anyone outside the research team unless you specifically request this in writing at some later date: they will be securely stored for at least 5 years within the Division of Preventive Medicine. A final report will be made available to you, to the Wildfire Management Branch, and to Alberta Workplace Health and Safety, but this will not identify any individual results.

Do I have to take part? Participation in this study is voluntary and you do not have to take part if you do not wish to do so. Whether you take part or not will have no effect on your employment or your current or future medical care.

Could any benefit come from this study? There will be no direct benefit to you from taking part in the study. If the study identifies exposure factors associated with poor health, this information will allow for an enhanced ability to assess the risk of adverse health effects, and help determine appropriate controls to minimize exposure.

Could any harm come to me from taking part in this study? Completion of the questionnaire carries no risk. Whether you agree or not will not affect your employment, your medical care or injury claims in any way, now or in the future. If you later decide you want the information you have given destroyed, we will do so if the request is received within 12 months of today.

Where can I find out more? If you have questions you can email us at HRivFire@ualberta.ca or phone us on the toll-free number 1-866-492-6093. If it is out of office hours please leave a voice message and we will get back to you very quickly. You can also write to the above address.

What do I do next? First we would ask that you read and complete the consent form.

Whom do I contact if I have concerns about the way the study is being conducted? The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492 2615.