

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS JANICE HAHN
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**Acquiring Personal Protective Equipment and Work Uniforms for Women
Firefighters and Lifeguards**

Historically, the firefighting profession has been predominantly made up of male firefighters, and to this day, approximately 95% of career firefighters in the United States are men. However, the number of women firefighters is growing across the nation, with numerous agencies seeing an upward trend of women firefighters being recruited and hired to work in the field. In Los Angeles County, there has been a concerted effort by the Los Angeles County Fire Department (LACoFD) and the Board of Supervisors to increase diversity among the Department, including recruiting and retaining more women firefighters and lifeguards. In March of 2023, the Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a motion to comprehensively work toward increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion within LACoFD, including solidifying support of the Women’s Fire League, which is one of the primary avenues through which women enter the field. Considering these efforts in the County to enhance diversity among LACoFD personnel, it is reasonable to anticipate an increase in the number of women firefighters and lifeguards in Los Angeles County in the coming years.

MOTION

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Despite the presence of women firefighters and lifeguards in the LACoFD for decades, there has not been enough consideration of the female form when designing work uniforms and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) like turnout suits and boots. Up to this day, the LACoFD only purchases uniforms and PPE from manufacturers who primarily design for the male form. While women firefighters have always deserved to have properly-fitted work uniforms and PPE, this becomes even more imperative as the number of women firefighters continues to trend upward. When fighting fires and performing lifeguard duties, it is essential for the comfort, mobility, and safety of personnel to have clothing that enhances their ability to perform essential job functions and ensures their protection while doing so. Both structural and wildland firefighters require PPE when fighting fires. When worn by women, PPE turnout suits are often excessively bulky in the neck, arm, leg, and crotch areas, leaving gaps in essential coverage and protection. This has implications beyond comfort and mobility as risk of injury is 33% higher for women firefighters.

When PPE does not fit properly, a number of serious safety concerns arise, including decreased physical protection, increased risk of injury, and a limitation in the ability to perform firefighting duties optimally. Women who experience ill-fitting PPE are at higher risk of thermal (heat and flame), liquid (water and steam), chemical, smoke, particulate, and carcinogenic exposure. Excessive bulk from turnout coats can make donning and doffing self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) much more difficult, putting women firefighters at greater risk of harm and injury. Gaps in the turnout neck collar and a too-large helmet can also impede vision, making it more difficult and dangerous to perform essential job duties. Excessive length in the crotch of turnout pants and tightness in the hips of turnout coat jackets that many women firefighters experience can limit the range of movement, creating increased risk of injury, and preventing

optimization of performance. In addition to PPE, the work uniforms that lifeguards wear over their swimsuits and firefighters wear on Emergency Medical Services (EMS) calls are also not made for women's bodies and can restrict movement, causing discomfort and increasing risk of injury. The majority of women firefighters experience one or more of these challenges with ill-fitting PPE and work uniforms.

While many firefighter uniform and PPE manufacturers have the capacity to develop gear specifically fitted for the female form, the vast majority of women firefighters receive clothing that is simply a scaled-down version of clothing designed for male bodies. Fighting fires and performing lifeguard duties is hazardous and risky, and all firefighters and lifeguards deserve to have PPE and clothing that fits properly, enhances safety, and allows them to excel in performing their job duties. Similar industries, such as law enforcement and military, have successfully acquired female-focused PPE and uniforms, and the LACoFD should follow suit. It is essential to work with manufacturers to develop gear and clothing that is standardized for all body types so that women firefighters and lifeguards have access to the same levels of protection, mobility, and safety as their male counterparts.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief of the Los Angeles County Fire Department (LACoFD) to work in collaboration with the Chief Executive Officer and the Women's Fire League to report back in writing in 60 days on a plan to ~~purchase~~ make Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and work uniforms specific for women firefighters and lifeguards available to LACoFD employees. The plan should consider the following:

1. Stakeholder engagement with women in the Department to understand the challenges with the current available PPE and uniform fits;

2. Collaboration with the National Fire Protection Association to work with manufacturers to encourage them to produce and distribute female-specific PPE and work uniforms;
3. Research into alternative manufacturers and vendors who can make and stock female-specific PPE and work uniforms for LACoFD employees; and
4. ~~include a~~ A cost analysis for various types of PPE and uniforms, including turnout coats and pants for structural firefighting and wildland PPE for female firefighters, and work uniforms worn by women lifeguards and firefighters responding to Emergency Medical Services (EMS) calls. ~~The plan should also include an~~ and identification of funding for purchase. ~~and a plan to collaborate with the National Fire Protection Association to work with manufacturers to obtain female-specific PPE and work uniforms.~~

WE, FURTHER, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Fire Department to send a 5-signature letter to the manufacturers and vendors that produce and distribute the PPE and uniforms purchased by LACoFD urging them to manufacture women's PPE and uniforms and make them more accessible to purchase.

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