Memorandum

To: Regional Fire Management Coordinators

From: Chief, Branch of Fire Management  CHRISTOPHER WILCOX

Subject: 2021 Guidance for the DOI Wildland Firefighter Medical Standards Program


Comprehensive medical exams are a critical component of wildland fire risk management and must continue despite the ongoing pandemic. **Exams are required for 2021**, including baseline exams for new firefighters, periodic exams for those who haven’t had an exam in the last 36 months, and periodic exams that were delayed in 2020 due to COVID-19. **However, the Pulmonary Function Test (PFT) will not be a required exam component in 2021 to reduce COVID-19 transmission risk to health care workers administering the test.**

The national contract with Comprehensive Health Services (CHS) has been updated and the Client Assess System (CAS) and Examinee Access System (EAS) will continue to be used for requesting exams, completing self-certifications or health screen questionnaires and printing certificates of medical qualification to provide at the Work Capacity Test (WCT).

There are two noteworthy FWS-specific process changes for 2021:

- **The FWS Joint Administrative Operations (JAO) staff will now sign Risk Mitigation/ Waivers (RM/Ws) for regular employees as the Servicing Human Resources Officer (SHRO).** RM/Ws will continue to be developed by FMOs and Regional MSP Leads and approved by the appropriate line officer; then the SHRO will certify the process.

- **Refuge Law Enforcement Officers seeking light, moderate and arduous red card qualifications are now participating in the DOI Wildland Firefighter MSP.** The Division of Refuge Law Enforcement will accept the fire exam in lieu of a law enforcement exam on years they are due for a fire exam. This is to ensure officers are not required to take both programmatic exams in the same year. Qualifications with no fitness requirement, including security qualifications (SEC1, SEC2, and SEC3), are unaffected.
Medical Clearance for Light and Moderate Fitness Rating

The medical clearance process for light and moderate fitness ratings are centralized and automated by CHS. All employees, regardless of hiring authority, whose fire line positions require light or moderate fitness ratings, must complete a Health Screening Questionnaire (HSQ) through EAS and print the certificate of clearance prior to taking the WCT. HSQs must be completed between 10 and 45 days prior to the WCT (10 days allows CHS time to validate HSQs and issue the certificate, and the 45 day limit is intended to ensure responses are sufficiently recent).

Employees who wish to serve in wildland fire positions and have not previously participated in theDOI MSP, including Law Enforcement employees, will be entered in the CAS by a Fire Management Officer (FMO) or their delegate. The “Light and Moderate Duty Work Capacity Assessment” option will be selected in the CAS and the employee will receive an email with login and password information to access EAS.

If significant health issues are identified on the HSQ, the employee will be provided additional instructions on how to obtain supporting information needed for medical clearance.

Medical Clearance for Arduous Fitness Rating

Baseline exams continue to be required for new employees, regardless of hiring authority, whose positions require arduous qualifications. JAO staff will enter new employees into the CAS and request baseline exams as part of the onboarding process. A CHS “qualified” or “qualified with risk mitigation/waiver” determination is required as a condition of hire prior to entrance on duty.

Current employees, including collateral duty fire personnel and Service Law Enforcement Officers, must complete a baseline exam to pursue arduous duty qualifications. Exams are requested in the CAS by a Fire Management Officer (FMO) or their delegate. While the exam is not a condition of employment, it is a condition of performing arduous duty wildland fire work. A CHS “qualified” or “qualified with risk mitigation/waiver” determination is required within 45 calendar days prior to taking the Work Capacity Test (WCT).

A periodic exam is required three years after the initial baseline exam, and every three years following. Periodic exams that were deferred in 2020 due to COVID-19 must be completed prior to issuance of an arduous duty qualification.

Self-certifications are completed annually between exam years and must be completed between 10 and 45 days prior to the WCT (10 days allows CHS time to validate responses and issue the certificate, and the 45 day limit is intended to ensure responses are sufficiently recent). Automatic reminders are no longer sent from the CAS for periodic exams or self-certifications. The “WLFF_Periodic Due” report is available in the CAS to assist with managing exam periodicity.

Employees who receive “Not qualified” medical determinations will be instructed to either provide more information, or recommend specific mitigations to be considered for the RM/W process. CHS may change a determination if the employee provides additional information.
Risk Mitigation/Waiver (RM/W) Process

The RM/W process described on the DOI MSP website has not changed for 2021. FMOs and Regional MSP Leads will continue to guide the interactive RM/W process, including drafting, routing, and submitting all associated documents within the timeframes specified on the website. The employee’s line officer (usually the Refuge Manager or Project Leader) decides whether the risk is acceptable. **JAO staff will review and sign all new RM/Ws for regular employees as SHRO** to certify the process has been completed appropriately. FMOs will continue to assume the responsibility of SHRO for Administratively Determined (AD) firefighters. Existing RM/Ws remain valid unless there is a change in medical condition.

Payment for Exams
Exams performed under the CHS contract are paid by a national level billing process. The employee is responsible for any cost related to obtaining additional medical testing or information needed to change a CHS medical determination. In rare cases, and when the FWS specifically requests the additional exam(s) or information, the local unit will cover the additional cost.

Questions regarding this program should be directed to:
- The appropriate Regional MSP Lead, listed at: [https://www.nifc.gov/medical_standards/Contact-Us/index.html](https://www.nifc.gov/medical_standards/Contact-Us/index.html)
- FWS Wildland Fire Safety Program Manager, Eric Fransted, at 208-387-5210 or [edward_fransted@fws.gov](mailto:edward_fransted@fws.gov)
- The DOI MSP Customer Service at 1-888-286-2521 or [wlffcsr@blm.gov](mailto:wlffcsr@blm.gov)

cc:
Regional Chiefs, National Wildlife Refuge System
Chief, Division of Natural Resources
Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System
Chief, Division of Human Capital
Regional Wildland Firefighter MSP Leads
Staff, Branch of Fire Management
JAO Division of Human Resource Operations: Personal Security
Chief, Division of Refuge Law Enforcement