

Last Updated 11/15/2013

FWS Implementation of DOI Medical Standards

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: *The DOI MSP Oversight Group's recent memo (dated 11/26/2012) says, "...beginning January 1, 2013 all incumbent arduous duty wildland firefighters who have not had a medical exam within the last three calendar years must have an exam." Does the date January 1, 2013 trigger an immediate need to run all incumbent arduous duty wildland firefighters through the DOI MSP again to determine if they have had an exam within the last three years and re-administer the WCT to employees with valid Incident Qualifications Cards (Redcard)?*

A: No. The date January 1, 2013 does not trigger an immediate need to run all incumbent arduous duty wildland firefighters through the DOI MSP again. Verifying this three year periodicity requirement for exams will occur when an incumbent's Redcard expires after January 1, 2013 and they wish to have a new one issued. An incumbent's Redcard will remain valid until the expiration date on the card even if the expiration date is after January 1, 2013.

Q: *Do we need to verify and document when an incumbent's last exam took place?*

A: No. Starting January 1, 2013, you simply need to ask the incumbent if they have had an exam within the last three years. If they answer yes, then have them complete the HSQ. If they answer no, they should complete the exam packet and go through the exam process. Documenting the date of an incumbent's last exam is not required. The incumbent is responsible for determining if they have had an exam within the last three years and notifying the testing official prior to participating in the arduous Work Capacity Test.

Q: *As a Project Leader, I have an incumbent permanent employee who had an exam less than three years ago and meets the intent of the "Incumbent Permanent Employee" category on the Exam Matrix. I, however, have concerns about this individual's current health. Can I require the individual to take an Annual Exam even though they were cleared in the past?*

A: Yes, Project Leaders/Fire Management Officers, have the management discretion to require the individual to take an Annual Exam if it is felt the employee is at risk if injury or illness resulting from participating in the Arduous Work Capacity Test.

Q: *I have an incumbent employee who recently had a physical exam completed by his personal physician. Does this incumbent still need to take an exam for the DOI MSP?*

A: It depends. If the employee had their personal physician fill out the forms provided in the DOI MSP Exam packet and the physician completed Part C and D of the exam packet, then it is very possible that the local SHRO will accept the physicians "Clearance" determination. However, if the exam did not test all the components of the DOI MSP exam and the exam packet forms are not completed in their entirety, then the exam will probably not be an acceptable substitute for the DOI MSP exam.

Q: *I have an employee who cannot remember when his last exam took place. Is there a national database with this information?*

A: The DOI MSP staff has a data base that was provided by the last MSP contractor. That contract ended in February 2011. Since February 2011, the exam records are tracked at the local level Servicing Human

Resource Office (SHRO). The DOI MSP staff can assist in searching for records if needed on a case-by-case basis but the intent is to rely on the incumbent to determine if they have had an exam within the last three years and notifying the testing official prior to the work capacity test (WCT). Documenting the date of an incumbent's last exam is not required.

Q: I will be bringing back temporary employees, who had an exam last year; do they need to take another exam?

A: Yes, Human Resources Offices require an exam as a condition of hire every time a temporary is hired or re-hired.

Q: I am an arduous duty wildland firefighter with health insurance. It would be cheaper for the government if I have the clinic just bill my insurance. Can I just use my insurance to cover the Annual Exam and pay my normal copay of \$15/20?

A: No, the use of personal insurance to offset government exam cost is prohibited. Fire Managers are required to follow standard procurement processes to pay for FWS wildland fire medical exams.

Q: You say the Annual Wildland Firefighter exam should be around \$180, does it have to be?

A: No, once the exam packet was developed, it was sent to medical practitioners for review. From the review, an average cost per exam was estimated at \$180 to perform the examination as described in the packet. Agreements established by FWS units have been as low as \$95 per exam.

Q: What if the clinic says the exam will cost \$350 per employee, what should I do?

A: Although \$180 is the government estimate, clinics vary in their assessed fees. In many cases, the initial high cost quote is based on multiple lab tests not required or indicated within the exam packet. Once the FWS official negotiating the rate for exams explains what is actually required to complete the exam, the average negotiated exam cost has been \$170. If, after explaining the exam requirements, a quote is still unusually high, the FWS official should use good judgment in clinic selection and factor in distance and travel times from the duty station to other available clinics as well as individual exam cost.

Q: In section B (questions completed by employee) some of the information at the bottom of each section makes it sound like the employee must complete a suite of additional testing. As an example, the cardiac section mentions the echocardiogram; does the Annual Exam Packet require the echocardiogram?

A: No, the only evaluation that must be completed is identified in section C. If the employee identifies an existing medical condition by checking a yes in section B the clinician in many cases, can make a clearance determination without additional testing. If, for example, an employee has had a previous heart condition, he/she may wish to bring supporting information from his/her personal physical or medical specialist to assist the examining clinician in making a clearance determination. The information at the bottom of each portion in section B describes several factors for making a determination but does not require them for a standard evaluation.

Q: The clinician wants to conduct additional tests, who can give approval?

A: Prior to performing any additional testing/evaluation (i.e. urinalysis, blood work, EKG, etc.), the clinician should contact DOI Medical Standards Program Customer Service to receive exam clarification and approval at (888) 286-2521 or wffcsr@blm.gov. As always you can contact your regional Wildland Safety Program Manager (WFSPM) or the FWS National Fire Safety Specialist Ted Mason at (208) 387-5831.

Q: *Why does the clinician want to conduct additional testing beyond what is described in the exam packet?*

A: The Annual Exam Packet was developed to allow the clinician to make a "Cleared" or "Not Cleared" determination without requiring further testing or evaluation beyond what is specifically identified in the exam packet. In some instances however, when the employee checks yes to certain preexisting/past medical conditions within section B the clinician may feel additional testing is needed to make a clearance determination.