Frequently Asked Questions

You can expect to hear the buzzword "Risk Assessment" more and more when new personal protective equipment (PPE) purchases are involved.

Why is a risk assessment important?

1. A risk assessment enables the fire department to identify and assess all the specific risks (dangers) involved in the duties performed by fire fighters and can therefore properly specify and outfit fire fighters with the appropriate PPE.
2. A risk assessment is a document that justifies why the fire department is specifying particular PPE. The justification derived from the risk assessment is supported by facts and data.
3. A regulated fire department is required by Texas Commission on Fire Protection (TCFP), because it is in NFPA 1851, to conduct a risk assessment. TCFP Compliance Officers are required to inspect and confirm that a risk assessment has been completed by fire departments on a least a biennial schedule.

What Is a Risk Assessment?

A risk assessment may be considered the identification, evaluation and estimation of the levels of risk involved in a situation, their comparisons against benchmarks and past experience, then determining an acceptable level of risk. A risk assessment is created by a fire department as described in NFPA 1851, *Standard on the Selection, Care, and Maintenance of Protective Ensembles for Structural Fire Fighting and Proximity Fire Fighting* (see Chapter 5, Subsection 5.1, 5.1.1, and 5.1.2). A risk assessment is completed in accordance with TCFP regulations (see Texas Government Code §419.027 – Biennial Inspections and §419.040 (c) – Standard Operating Procedure and Texas Administrative Code §435.1 – Protective Clothing). The purpose of the risk assessment is to ensure that regulated fire departments have fully assessed the risks associated with the duties assigned to the fire fighter and has provided to the fire fighters the PPE suitable for the tasks the individual is expected to perform.

Chapter 5 of NFPA 1851, 2014, states that a risk assessment must be performed, including the following considerations written in section 5.1.2:

- Types of duties performed
- Frequency of use of ensemble elements
- Organization's experiences
- Incident operations
- Geographic location and climate
- Specific physical area of operation
- Likelihood of Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) terrorist incident

Completing a risk assessment can be done in a few ways. A risk assessment can be a brief document or it can be detailed and long depending on how much information and data is included. An outline is always a good place to start and for the most part this has already been done in Chapter 5 of the NFPA 1851 standard. From here, fire departments can do everything on their own or they can look at sample risk assessments provided by TCFP or done by neighboring departments or large metro departments. Professional safety consultants are also resources that help complete risk assessments.

The key is to do a risk assessment. By doing a risk assessment, the department may uncover previously unknown risks to its fire fighters and it should result in a more rigorous and objective determination of the performance requirements of the PPE being selected for purchase by the fire department. The risk assessment will help reduce liabilities to the department and those involved in specifying PPE if an accident, injury or line of duty death occurs.

What is a risk?

Risk is the chance, high or low, of someone or something being harmed by a hazard and how serious the harm could be.

What is a hazard?

A hazard may be considered anything that could cause harm that may be encountered at the scene of an emergency incident.

When do I have to complete the risk assessment?

The risk assessment must be performed either (1) prior to the selection of new structural and/or proximity fire fighting ensembles or (2) no later than February 28, 2017, whichever occurs first.

Prior to February 28, 2017:

- Completion of the risk assessment *is* necessary for purchase of ensembles if a department is considering switching from proximity to structural
- Completion of the risk assessment is not necessary when individual PPE ensemble elements are being replaced (ex: gloves, helmets, etc.).
- Completion of the risk assessment is not necessary for purchase of ensembles if the purchase is made under an existing contract with a vendor.

What should I include in my risk assessment?

At a minimum you should include the elements listed in Chapter 5.1.2 of NFPA 1851, 2014 Edition.

Is there a template that I can follow to do my risk assessment?

Yes, there are suggested but *not required* templates located in the information packet and under the compliance tab on the TCFP website.

Is the risk assessment a legal requirement?

Yes, the risk assessment is required by the adoption of the NFPA standard in Texas Government Code §419.040 (b) and in Texas Administrative Code §435.1(2).

Who is responsible for approving the risk assessment for the fire department?

The Head of Department is responsible for approving the department's risk assessment.

Do I need to use a consultant?

No. Use of a consultant is at the discretion of Head of Department.

Who do I involve in a risk assessment?

A Head of Department has the discretion to involve anyone necessary to complete the risk assessment.

Do I need to sign my risk assessment?

Although a signature is not necessary on the document, the fire department must be able to verify that the risk assessment has been approved by the Head of Department.

How long do I need to keep my risk assessment?

The risk assessment shall be kept indefinitely and updated and revised when necessary.

Does the TCFP conduct risk assessment for regulated agencies?

No. The TCFP does not conduct risk assessments for agencies.

What is my Compliance Officer's role with the risk assessment?

The Compliance Officer will verify that your agency is in compliance with the risk assessment requirements by reviewing the department's appropriate standard operating procedure and the reviewing the risk assessment as needed.

How and where should the risk assessment be reflected in my department's SOP's?

- Per Texas Administrative Code §435.1(3), regulated fire departments are to maintain an SOP regarding the use, selection, care, and maintenance of protective clothing worn by fire fighting personnel. The purpose of the risk assessment is to justify the department's decisions regarding the selection of protective clothing for its personnel, and should be reflected in this SOP.

- Texas Administrative Code, §435.15 also requires departments to develop, maintain, and use an SOP for personnel operating at emergency incidents, and the SOP is to include a limitation on operations that can be safely performed by personnel. The risk assessment will also assist the department in making decisions regarding operational limitations, particularly in light of the protective clothing being worn by personnel, and should again be reflected in this SOP.

- Texas Administrative Code, §435.11 calls for the development, maintenance, and use of an incident management system by all departments. The adopted system will, in addition to other requirements, require operations to be conducted in a manner that recognizes hazards and assists in the prevention of accidents and injuries. The risk assessment will certainly aid the department in reviewing its incident management system, and making revisions as necessary.