

Cleaning Personal Protective Equipment
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By now, we all are aware that the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) recommends that personal protective equipment (PPE) be cleaned at least twice per year as well as immediately after being exposed to hazardous materials or body fluids. When we look at the reasoning behind this, it becomes apparent why.

First, contaminated PPE presents a health risk to the firefighter since toxins and carcinogens can enter the body through ingestion, inhalation, and/or absorption. We take extreme measures on the fireground to avoid exposure to the products of combustion by using SCBA, turnouts, hoods, helmets, and protective footwear. Then walk away with those same contaminants on our PPE to touch and breath everywhere we go.

In addition, we are in this business to protect the public. How then do we explain how we let children touch, hold, and wear our contaminated gear during open houses or when they just visit the firehouse with their parents? And how many of them are our own children?

Other good reasons to clean our PPE:

- Soiled PPE reflect less radiant heat
- PPE heavily contaminated with hydrocarbons are more likely to conduct electricity.
- Oil, grease, and hydrocarbon deposits from smoke can cause PPE to ignite.
- Reflective trim may become less visible.
- Fabrics may weaken and tear more easily and thread may become loose

Cleaning guidelines may vary and it is always best to follow the manufacturer's recommendations, but cleaning your PPE is vital for everyone's safety.