

### Details on the authority

The Capital District Fire and Rescue Service (CDFARS) was formed on the 1st of June 2000, when Reykjavik FARS and Hafnarfjordur FARS merged. Upon the merger, the CDFARS took over the duties of the Reykjavik Airport Fire department. All towns and local governments in the metropolitan area now take part in the operation of this powerful rescue team. The management of SHS consists of the mayor, who is also the chairman as well as being director of the management and the chairmen in the town councils.

The CDFARS are fire fighters, deal with fire prevention techniques and handle all emergency medical transport in the metropolitan area, which includes 170,000 residents, The CDFARS also assists the members of the National Civil Defence of Iceland.

The staff includes 154 members (144 (93%) male and 10 (6,5%) female) of which 108 are available on call and rescue missions. The majority of the employees are between 30-49 years old or approx. 57%. The average age is 41 year, around 20% of the employees are younger than 29 years old and 23% are older than 50 years old.

### Safety and well-being is everything

Occupational safety and the well-being of the employees in CDFARS is extremely important. The employees are under a lot of both physical and mental stress, especially those who are on call for the establishment. Therefore, the

importance of occupational safety at these jobs is great as they can often involve taking great risks. That makes it even more important to emphasise the occupational safety issues. The quality of the work is, to a large extent, dependent on the physical and mental state of the staff – this is more so in this work than in most other places that come under public administration.

### No specific project

CDFARS has not concentrated its efforts around any one specific project regarding health promotion among the employees in the work place, rather there are many different projects going on that unitedly are moving towards the goals of WHP (work place health promotion).

As there is not one specific project in question regarding health promotion for the staff, who becomes involved with or is aware of the ongoing projects differs. In general, however it is safe to say that it becomes known to the entire staff in the CDFARS what projects are going on – both those who are on call duty and those employees who do regular office work. The establishment's managers are responsible for these projects. The vice president of the fire department, the staff manager in charge of finances and the field manager are responsible for projects pertaining to the health and well being of the employees.

As there is not one specific project in question it is difficult to establish the exact cost related to this health promotion involving the staff directly and what is related more to the work envi-

ronment factor. A brief estimate of the direct and indirect cost related to the health and well-being of the staff and the improvement of the work environment runs to millions of Icelandic crowns per year.

### Focus on physical and mental health

It is obvious that the activities in an establishment like CDFARS are largely dependent on the physical and mental health of the employees. Those individuals who apply for jobs there have to undergo tests of strength and endurance. Since CDFARS started up in 2000 the chiefs have cooperated with representatives from the staff and reviewed the endurance tests that are being used in the establishment – both the endurance tests required for applicants before they are allowed into the team, as well as the standard tests that the team members have to pass on an annual basis.

CDFARS has an agreement with a confidential physician who will be responsible for the endurance tests that the establishment uses as well as all registration of the employees' sick leave.

### Action areas

- The cornerstone in the CDFARS health promotion is the annual physical examination and endurance test. It is designated in the health promotion effort that the work that goes into it should be of the best quality compared to what is being done abroad and that comparison should preferably be made to the other Nordic countries. In the health promotion plan of CDFARS it is also stated that a definition is needed of the crisis therapy that the employees receive when they need it after working under especially stressful conditions.
- All the employees in CDFARS get a one year membership card for a gym. A physical exercise programme is part of the daily routine in the training of all the employees that are on call duty – however, other employees at CDFARS working normal shifts are also encouraged to do physical training. A physical therapist assists the employees at the gym.
- The employees are offered psychological assistance and crisis therapy related to their jobs.
- Smoking is not allowed at work. The employees are offered a refund for half the price it costs to take a course to stop smoking and if they are still nonsmokers in one years time, they will get a full refund.
- It is emphasised to the employees that they follow strict safety measures at work – especially for those who are on call.
- The employees who are on call take courses on a regular basis that are related to the job. These courses are more often than not held abroad. Most of them are held in Sweden or The United States (ambulance transport). Occupational health and safety measures are in the forefront during these courses.
- In the CDFARS employment planning it is especially stated that the establishment should strive to encourage women to work in the team, while not slackening the requirements that the employees need to fulfil and that the same expectations apply to all the team members. It is worth mentioning that when FARS of Reykjavik was working as a separate fire department, the employees had to compose a work plan with a special view to equal rights of the sexes. In preparing the work plan the chiefs of the fire department sought collaboration with the equal rights representative in the city council and the outcome, among other things, was an evaluation of the admittance rules into the fire department. No women were then at work amongst those who were on call and the chiefs of the department wished to amend the situation. The actions that were taken led to the participation of the equal rights representative in the admittance procedure. Since then two women have joined the CDFARS team in spite of the fact that there have been no changes made to the admittance rules.
- In the CDFARS work plan there is special consideration for family people. The department is supposed to strive as much as possible to coordinate the demands and special wishes of their employees regarding their work on the one hand and their responsibilities to their families on the other. It has been made possible for both women and men to tem-

porarily lessen their workload when special situations in the family demands.

### **Establishment of co-operation and communication structures**

Information is distributed to the employees through an efficient inner net system. In that way the chiefs as well as other staff can send announcements in a quick and secure manner via e-mail. The employees elect their special representatives who have meetings with the chiefs once a month and important messages are conveyed there from both sides.

A CDFARS confidential physician is in charge of the registration of the employees' sick leave and accesses the information if needed. The confidential physician is also in charge of the physical examinations and the endurance tests that the on call team has to pass on an annual basis

Special surveys have not been conducted among the employees, but the employees have special representatives that meet regularly with the chiefs of the department, where messages can be conveyed.

As a result of the merging of the fire departments in the Reykjavik area there is an ongoing and extensive reevaluation of the activities of the CDFARS. This also concerns the health care and well-being of the employees. In that field the chiefs of the CDFARS have worked in close co-operation with the fire brigade in Gautaborg. There are plans to reorganise and increase the demands made in the endurance test. In this respect the chiefs of CDFARS are looking towards Gautaborg as a model, since their level of activities is similar.

### **Maintaining health and positive image**

CDFARS has not made a survey to explore the public's/customers' opinion of the department. Generally it is safe to say though, that the chiefs along with the other staff have been successful in maintaining a positive department image. This is reflected, among other things, in how visible the team is externally in the community

As mentioned above, a survey has not been made on the total outcome of the projects that the CDFARS has been working on. It is clear that both physical and mental health is very important for the employees and that these considerations are well taken care of. It was clear from interviewing the chiefs in the department, that factors relating to health promotion in the workplace are an integral part of the working environment. In the interview with the chiefs of the department it also became clear that as a result of the merging of FARS in the metropolitan area there is more attention paid to evaluation of the general

activities including those that relate to the healthcare policy of the establishment.

The CDFARS will continue along the same line and there are plans to strengthen the health promotion effort still more. Coordinating the health promotion into the regular activities is being emphasised.