



REPLACING FIREFIGHTERS' TURNOUT GEAR

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1851-2008, Standard on Selection, Care, and Maintenance of Protective Ensembles for Structural Fire Fighting and Proximity Firefighting requires fire departments to develop criteria for removing protective clothing from service. Chapter 10.1.1 states that the retirement criteria should be based on factors such as overall condition, specific deterioration of materials or components, and age. Chapter 10.1.2 adds, “structural firefighting ensembles shall be retired no more than ten years from the date of manufacture.”

Since the publishing of the 2008 Standard, literature accompanying newly purchased turnout jackets and trousers also cites NFPA 1851-2008 and the 10-year lifespan of their protective ensembles.

The Division of Fire Safety and the Department of Labor, Office of Public Employee’s Occupational Safety and Health promulgated N.J.A.C. 12:100, which adopts specific NFPA editions and Standards. For example, 12:100-10.7 for Protective Clothing; Body Protection references NFPA 1971-1986. This edition of the NFPA Standard does not contain the 10-year lifespan verbiage. NJPEOSH enforces N.J.A.C. 12:100 and not NFPA 1851-2008.

New Jersey’s fire departments must inspect and evaluate turnout gear by visually checking the general condition, discoloration, and flame damage at least yearly. A field test should be performed on suspected damaged shells. The test is performed by stretching the material of the turnout ensemble and seeing if it rips. Ripping would indicate a severe deterioration of the shell’s integrity, and the turnout jacket or pants should be removed from service.

While NFPA 1851-2008 is not the law in New Jersey, it is a national industry standard. Fire departments should consider adopting this as a written practice, especially for active interior firefighters.

The Safety Director reminds fire departments they need a written program for the inspection, cleaning, repair, and eventual retirement of protective equipment. Gear must be formally inspected at least yearly. More often is recommended for active firefighters. Fire departments do not need to have certified inspectors. However, inspectors should be educated to recognize deficient conditions. Documenting the training of inspectors adds confidence and credibility to the program. Each fire department must evaluate when to repair or replace damaged or deteriorated turnout gear.

Firefighters should inspect their gear after each use. There should be a written procedure for reporting and correcting deficiencies. The program should also include criteria for frequent cleaning gear. Turnout gear can contain combustible contaminants that would present an additional and unnecessary hazard to interior firefighters. Be sure to keep and follow manufacturers’ instructions as part of the department’s turnout gear inspection and cleaning policy.

A model turnout gear policy and inspection form are available on the [MSI Fire & EMS webpage](#)