



Greensburg Volunteer Fire Department

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Dear GVFD Members:

Something I hope I never have to do as Chief, having to pay the Department's last respects to family members of a victim that perished from injuries as a result of one of our Fire Apparatus having been driven by one of our members who carelessly decided to drive a truck or respond to an incident in their personal own vehicle while being under the influence of drugs or alcohol. It would be equally hard for me to deal with having to face the family of one of our members, who while on scene of an incident, either was seriously injured or killed or caused harm or killed somebody or others while under the influence.

With that being said, I feel you should all be aware how I feel about Alcohol Use and the Greensburg Fire Department. I have a ZERO-TOLERANCE when it comes to the firefighters of the Greensburg Fire Department responding to an alarm after having consumed alcohol.

This is a topic that is appropriate not only during this time of year, especially around the Christmas and New Year Holiday Season, but it applies equally as well to the entire year.

I think there is a disconnect in some from what the facts truly are regarding the consumption of alcohol. I was no-means a saint in my early years. But the facts remain that we respond to motor vehicle accidents, and respond to fire alarms every day. We feel the pressure of today's society much more today than in years past.

While there are a lot of factors that can affect how long consumed alcohol will remain in your system, a basic rule of thumb in on average, the liver can process 1 ounce of alcohol every hour, and it can be detected in the bloodstream for several hours, and in the urine for several days.

If you are driving a Greensburg Fire Department Vehicle and involved in an accident you will no doubt be required to be tested for alcohol or drugs in your system. That is a FACT.

To give you all an idea of facts on how long alcohol stays in your system:

- Alcohol enters the bloodstream through your stomach.
- In general, the liver can process up to an ounce of alcohol every hour.
- Think of consumption as 1 oz. of Whiskey is the same as 5 ozs. of wine, and the same as one – 12 ozs. of domestically produced beer, i.e.: Coors, PBR, Miller, Budweiser.
- The effects of alcohol come from its presence in the blood and body tissues.
- Alcohol can be detected in the blood, urine, and even on the breath.

Around 20% of the alcohol a person drinks is absorbed rapidly into the blood stream through the stomach. A further 80% approximately is absorbed by the small intestines. Any remainder that is not metabolized leaves the body through sweat, urine, and saliva. Once alcohol reaches the bloodstream, it goes to the liver to be processed or metabolized. The liver produces enzymes that break down the alcohol molecules.

When someone is drinking alcohol particularly quickly, the liver cannot process all the alcohol at the same rate, so it remains in the body. The higher a person's blood alcohol concentration (BAC) is, the more pronounced the effects are. These may include:

- Reduced Inhibitions
- Impaired Memory
- Slurred Speech
- Confusion
- Difficulty Concentration
- Breathing problems
- Nausea or Vomiting
- Impaired Balance and Coordination
- Irritability

Now are the above listed behavioral factors anything we should tolerate on the fire ground or at an incident? Of course not.

Next let's look at age. Alcohol stays in the liver longer, the older a person is. Blood flow may be slower, and an older person may be more likely to be taking medication that affects the liver. These factors mean that alcohol is processed at a slower rate, which can increase the amount of alcohol absorbed into the body.

SEX. Though not true for everyone, alcohol tends to stay in a woman's system longer than men. This is because women tend to have a higher percentage of body fat and a lower percentage of body water than men.

FOOD. Because alcohol is absorbed into the digestive tract, the presence of food in the stomach has a significant effect on the absorption rate of alcohol. Having a full stomach can slow down absorption dramatically.

RACE. Some people of East Asian descent lack the enzymes necessary to break down alcohol. This can cause a reaction that includes facial flushing, nausea, dizziness, rapid heart rate, and headache.

FAMILY HISTORY. Research has shown that alcohol use disorder, or alcoholism, tends to run in families, suggesting a genetic link. However, genes alone are not responsible for whether someone becomes an alcoholic. Studies have shown that both genetic and environmental factors can affect how the body processes and deals with alcohol.

BODY SIZE. Like other drugs and medications, a person's body size can impact how alcohol is processed. A person who is a lighter weight or who has a smaller body frame will be more affected than someone who weighs more or has a larger body frame.

TIME SINCE THE LAST DRINK. The liver is more able to process the next drink the longer it has been since the previous one. Someone who is quickly drinking one alcoholic drink after another is more likely to experience stronger effects in a shorter amount of time.

MEDICATIONS. Certain medications can affect how the body is able to process alcohol. Medications that are specifically known to interact with alcohol include:

- Anti-anxiety medications and antidepressants
- Antibiotics
- Allergy Medications
- Diabetes Medications

HOW LONG DOES ALCOHOL STAY IN THE SYSTEM. It depends on what is being tested.

BLOOD. The concentration of alcohol in the blood, or BAC, helps to determine how long alcohol stays in the system. In general, alcohol is eliminated at 0.015 per hour. For example, someone who has a BAC of .08 which is when it becomes illegal to drive, will take around 5.5 hours to flush the alcohol out of their body. PLEASE NOTE HERE. All 50 states have now set .08% BAC as the legal limit for driving under the influence (DUI) or driving while impaired (DWI). But for Commercial Drivers, a BAC of .04% can result in a DUI or DWI conviction nationwide. If you are driving one of our Fire Trucks having a gross vehicle weight rating in excess of 26,001 pounds, which is what most of our trucks are, the legal limit is 0.04% BAC. It is important to know that someone who drinks a lot or on an empty stomach may still have alcohol in their system the very next day, making it illegal to drive a vehicle even then. Do not get taken into the old wives' tale, drinking coffee can sober one up. That is hogwash. Only time and your liver can counter the effects of alcohol on a body. Caffeine in coffee can counteract the tiredness induced by alcohol which might explain why a cup of coffee is popular in many places at the end of a meal. What coffee can do is, it creates a wide-awake drunk. It can't remove feelings of drunkenness or some of the cognitive deficits alcohol causes.

URINE. How long alcohol is detectable in the urine will depend on the test used, as some urine tests are far more sensitive than others. Currently, there is a test that can detect alcohol use up to 80 hours, or 3 to 4 days, after the last drink a person had.

BREATH. Frequently checked as part of routine breathalyzer testing, alcohol can be detected in the breath for up to 24 hours after the last drink. If you can smell alcohol on a person's breath in the morning after the "night-before", more than likely, that person is still legally intoxicated with a BAC greater than 0.04% and not qualified to drive a fire truck. Often times there are those who think a "chew" or chewing gum or even a "breath-mint" will mask their drinking, but there are other tale-tell signs that will surely display your state of inebriation.

HAIR. The testing of hair can be used to detect the use of many different substances, including alcohol. Alcohol can be detected for around 90 days after an alcoholic drink was consumed.

SALIVA. Trace amounts of alcohol can be detected in a saliva swab around 10—24 hours after the last drink.

THE LONG-TERM RISKS – HEALTHWISE. While alcohol use is commonplace, there are health risks associated with heavy alcohol use.

- Cancer of the mouth, throat, and breast
- Stroke
- Heart Disease
- Liver Disease
- Brain or Nervous System Disease
- **ACCIDENTS!!!!**

Keeping track of what and how much a person drinks can help them recognize when they might be drinking too much. For many people, drinking alcohol is a part of life. For example, at the Station, socializing with fellow firefighters. However, regular use of alcohol is not without risk, and the alcohol can remain in your system for quite a while, depending on several factors. Make no mistake, drinking alcohol impairs decision-making even when we are not personally aware of it. Our motor control sometimes appears unaffected by alcohol, but our actions may not be the right course of action.

We as firefighters driving heavy firefighting apparatus or responding to an incident in our privately-owned vehicles, may have to quickly react to stimuli such as when a car comes plowing through an intersection or pulls out in front of you, or God forbid a child gets away from their parent and darts out in front of you from the sidewalk. When you drink alcohol and respond to an alarm in this case, you can be less successful to be able to override automatically and use cognitive control to safely navigate the situation. It is a fact that intoxicated drivers are less successful at making quick changes.

I am not a medical expert, but I can research and read. The words written here are undisputable. Therefore, as this Fire Department progresses, I want it to be known that if I detect alcohol in any Greensburg Fireman or in any member of a fire department assisting the Greensburg Volunteer Fire Department, I will immediately have the individual removed from the fire ground scene. I expect the Captains and Line Officers to follow my lead and help prevent instances where such action may occur and take any and all necessary steps that relate to the breach of this policy. I will seek and insist on either the suspension from a Company, suspend driving privileges, or mandate an expulsion from the Department if warranted. As Chief, I have the responsibility of safety just as all of you do, first for the members of this department and second as an obligation to the City of Greensburg. I am adamant that I will enforce this policy for both the department and the City.


In conclusion, I do not want any member of the Greensburg Fire Department to respond to an incident, if you have been drinking – stay home and have fun. We may not be able to take advantage of your knowledge or expertise, but rest assured the department will accomplish its mission without you and all the while, being as safe as we can be.

Again, for the Safety of All members of the Greensburg Volunteer Fire Department, I want nothing more than Happiness and Health for you and your families during this Blessed Christmas Season, and Health, Happy, and Safe New Year.

Please see chart attached.

Sincerely,

Thomas M. Bell, Chief

		 BLOOD ALCOHOL CONTENT (BAC) Table for Male (M) / Female (F)								
Number of Drinks		Body Weight in Pounds								Driving Condition
		100	120	140	160	180	200	220	240	
0	M	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	Only Safe Driving Limit
	F	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	
1	M	.06	.05	.04	.04	.03	.03	.03	.02	Driving Skills Impaired
	F	.07	.06	.05	.04	.04	.03	.03	.03	
2	M	.12	.10	.09	.07	.07	.06	.05	.05	
	F	.13	.11	.09	.08	.07	.07	.06	.06	
3	M	.18	.15	.13	.11	.10	.09	.08	.07	Legally Intoxicated
	F	.20	.17	.14	.12	.11	.10	.09	.08	
4	M	.24	.20	.17	.15	.13	.12	.11	.10	
	F	.26	.22	.19	.17	.15	.13	.12	.11	
5	M	.30	.25	.21	.19	.17	.15	.14	.12	
	F	.33	.28	.24	.21	.18	.17	.15	.14	

Subtract .01% for each 40 minutes that lapse between drinks.
 1 drink = 1.5 oz. 80 proof liquor, 12 oz. 5% beer, or 5 oz. 12% wine.
Fewer than 5 persons out of 100 will exceed these values.