

## **“Evaluating Fitness-for-Duty”**

*by William M. Cody, Battalion Chief*

**Source:** [The National Fire Academy, U.S. Fire Administration, Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\)](#)

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**About:** Los Angeles Fire Department Battalion Chief William M. Cody investigates existing solutions in evaluating fitness-for-duty and determines that the technological tools available (in 2001) were impractical for daily use or inaccurate, thus preventing their widespread adoption. Current advances in mobile technology have begun to solve this problem, and Predictive Safety is at the fore.

**Summary:** Cody investigates solutions for improving evaluation of firefighters' fitness-for-duty, and offers recommendations for improving the LAFD's ability to evaluate fitness-for-duty among its firefighters. The project sought to identify, in order, what procedures or technologies were recognized to evaluate fitness-for-duty, the pros and cons of implementing such procedures/technologies, what obstacles the LAFD faced in implementing them, and what other fire departments used or did to evaluate fitness-for-duty. Also employed in the research were “a review of the literature on sleep and alertness, fatigue, shift-work, and fitness-for-duty evaluation methods and technologies; a survey of the Los Angeles County fire-based EMS providers regarding fit-for-duty in other industries; and interviews with scientists currently working the field of fatigue evaluation.” Cody's findings found that “sleep disruption and sleep deprivation may result from shift-work; sleep debit is cumulative and performance is only restored through sleep; work schedules and consecutive hours worked are major components of stress and fatigue in the workplace; stress and fatigue can lead to mistakes; daily duty schedules, overtime policies, and fitness-for-duty evaluation methods should take into account the existence of fatigue and that countermeasures are needed to ensure the health and safety of both the public and the workforce.” However, Cody also concludes that at the time of his project (2001), existing “technology-based tools currently available for evaluating and documenting fitness to work are either not practical for daily use in a field setting or they produce an unacceptably high rate of false positives and false negatives and therefore are not in wide-spread use in any industry.”