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## Proposed smoking ban for firefighters backed

203

TALLAHASSEE — (AP) — The Legislature should block fire departments from hiring smokers, tobacco chewers and snuff users, say state Insurance Commissioner Tom Gallagher and a firefighters union.

Because tobacco use contributes to heart disease — the top killer of firefighters nationwide — the Professional Firefighters of Florida has joined Gallagher, also the state fire marshal, in backing a bill prohibiting newly hired firefighters from using tobacco.

The requirement would exempt firefighters already employed, said Bob Carver, president of the union.

"It doesn't matter what form of tobacco products you're using," Carver said. "Whatever form, it is a health risk."

Massachusetts has a similar ban, Carver said, as do 12 cities and two counties in Florida.

The firefighters group represents 11,000 paramedics and firefighters and 105 city and county fire departments. The fire marshal's office

oversees fire departments in Florida.

Gallagher's office already spends \$250,000 a year on smoke-ending programs for the state's 16,000 firefighters. The program has helped lower the incidence of smoking from 40 percent to 22 percent during the last five years, he said.

Because firefighters are exposed to smoke, toxic chemicals and high stress levels, they make prime victims for heart attacks, cardiologists say.

Add smoking, high blood pressure and being overweight to the list and risks skyrocket.

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