

OCFPS Membership:

This is a copy of an e-mail I received from firefighterclosecalls.com. I think it is important that we all read this letter. If you want to know more about what is happening, contact your US Congressman (contact information is below). After all, you may be helping your own family.

Chuck R.
Webmaster

Hey...

Odd's are, if you are going to die in the line of duty as a firefighter, it will be a heart attack or stroke related death...so, put your family in these families places.

Here is another article about more firefighters families being denied Federal benefits related to Hometown Heroes. Seated at a table in their attorney's office, Susan Falkousiki and Kathy Shea are close to seething. Their husbands names are on the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial in Emmitsburg....the memorial created by Congress and located on federal property. Yet, the federal government has denied each of the widows' requests for a death benefit of more than a quarter million dollars - a death benefit Congress created for the families of firefighters who die on duty from stroke or heart attack. When Congress passed the bill it called it the "Hometown Heroes Survivors Benefits Act of 2003".

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, 34 claims have been denied, 0 have been approved and about 200 are pending review.

According to the law, in order for a family to qualify for the benefit, the public safety officer's death would have had to happen during or within twenty-four hours of work or training that was "...nonroutine stressful or strenuous..."

Rensselaer Assistant Chief Michael Falkouski died from a stroke he had as he was getting out of his car after arriving at an early-morning fire on January 23, 2005. Susan Falkouski can imagine the scene and thinks the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Office in the Bureau of Justice Assistance got it wrong.

"The adrenaline just pumps and they have to respond," Falkouski said of firefighters. "It's really quite amazing to watch. I went with my husband to several fires and then I stopped going because I didn't want to see what he did. I know what he did. They don't."

On January 24, 2004, after checking out a report of a smoke at a nursing home, Elsmere Chief Keving Shea had a heart attack just as he was about to drive home. The attorney working with Shea's widow, Kathy and with Susan Falkouski is Terence Hannigan. Hannigan is also a firefighter who worked with Chief Shea.

"Ordering equipment, washing rigs, training drills are routine," Hannigan says. "When the tones go off in the firehouse, in my world, that's not routine, okay. I mean, that is the exception. That's what we train for, but that's the event that's going to trigger the heart attack or additional stress."

Kathy Shea took exception to not only the denial of her application but also to part of the letter sent to Hannigan and signed by Hope D. Janke, the director of the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Office. Janke's letter said, in part, "Although the PSOB Act requires that this claim be denied, it in no way diminishes Kevin Shea's efforts and service to his community, the entire PSOB Office staff extends our condolences to the Shea family."

"You know, it was like, 'Thank you very much...thanks for all that he did, but, hey, gotta go now,' and that's - just not the way it should be done.

Hannigan is handling the appeal for Shea and Falkouski. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, thirty-four claims have been denied, none has been approved and about two hundred are pending review. From CBS6Albany.com.

This is advice from those who know: APPEAL. Appeal each and every one immediately and spread the word to those effected to appeal.

For those of you that would like to see the Feds take another look at their current practices, **contact your Federal Representative:** <http://www.house.gov/writerep/> and ask them to find out why this is happening.

And for those who would like to minimize the possibility of a heart attack or stroke, take a look at these:

<http://www.healthy-firefighter.org/>

http://www.foodfit.com/iaff/default_issue23.asp

Take Care,
BillyG

The Secret List 4-10-07 1653 hours

www.FireFighterCloseCalls.com <<http://www.FireFighterCloseCalls.com>>