

Expanded Workers' Compensation Benefits for Volunteer First Responders in Pennsylvania

On November 4th, Governor Tom Wolf signed Senate Bill 94 (SB-94) into law, after it had unanimously passed both the Pennsylvania House and Senate last week. SB-94 is the latest amendment to the Pennsylvania Workers' Compensation Act and expands the definition of who is considered an employee of volunteer emergency responders to include those that do not actively respond to emergency calls.

Previously the various volunteer emergency responders associated with Pennsylvania's municipalities and government agencies were not eligible for workers' compensation benefits in the unfortunate event that they were injured or killed while fulfilling their duties as a volunteer, unless they also responded to emergency calls.

Some of the emergency responders that are considered employees and eligible for workers' compensation benefits are:

- Volunteer firefighters
- Volunteer ambulance corps
- Officers, directors, rescue and lifesaving squad members or any other members of volunteer rescue and lifesaving squads
- Volunteer members of State Parks and Forest program
- Pennsylvania Deputy Game Protectors
- Special waterways patrolmen
- Forest firefighters/ forest fire protection employees
- Volunteer members of hazardous materials response teams
- Local coordinators of emergency management

There are more bills pending in the Pennsylvania Legislature to expand available benefits to Pennsylvania's selfless first responders; including a bill that would have the Coronavirus and its complications to be a presumed occupational illness for first responders.