



FIRE STATION SAUNA OPERATIONS AND SAFETY

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

*A governance framework for the safe, administrative use
of sauna equipment in fire station facilities*

Prepared by

Daniel Higuera, PhD

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Daniel Higuera, PhD

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SECTION 1: Purpose And Scope

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is to establish standardized operational guidance for the safe and consistent use of sauna facilities within fire department environments. This SOP provides governance for sauna installation, use, supervision, and documentation in order to promote firefighter safety, operational readiness, and responsible program oversight.

Sauna exposure represents a form of passive heat stress that produces measurable cardiovascular and thermoregulatory responses. Within the fire service, where personnel may already be exposed to high environmental temperatures, physical exertion, and physiological strain during emergency operations, the use of sauna equipment must occur within a structured framework that prioritizes safety and operational readiness. This SOP establishes procedures designed to:

- Provide standardized operational guidance for sauna use within fire department facilities
- Define roles and responsibilities associated with sauna program oversight
- Establish safe operating parameters for sauna exposure
- Ensure firefighters remain capable of immediate response to emergency incidents
- Reduce operational risk through clear documentation, supervision, and maintenance procedures

The intent of this SOP is not to mandate sauna use but rather to provide governance for departments that have installed or intend to install sauna equipment within their facilities.

1.2 Scope

This SOP applies to all fire department personnel who utilize sauna facilities located within department buildings or training facilities. Covered personnel include career firefighters, volunteer firefighters, fire officer personnel, probationary firefighters and recruits when authorized, and department personnel participating in wellness or recovery programs. The procedures established in this document apply to all sauna equipment located in fire stations, training facilities, and department wellness or recovery rooms, regardless of sauna type, manufacturer, or method of acquisition. This SOP governs voluntary sauna use conducted during non-emergency operational periods only. It does not replace existing departmental policies related to firefighter rehabilitation during emergency incidents.

1.3 Operational Context

Sauna equipment has become increasingly common in fire station environments as part of broader firefighter wellness and recovery initiatives. In many departments, sauna units have been installed through donations, local wellness programs, or internal member advocacy. While sauna use may offer recovery or wellness benefits, the integration of sauna equipment into fire stations introduces operational considerations unique to the fire service environment. Firefighters operate within a profession characterized by unpredictable emergency response demands, high environmental heat exposure, and

variable levels of physical fatigue. Without structured governance, sauna use may introduce avoidable risks including dehydration, excessive heat exposure, delayed response readiness, and equipment misuse. This SOP establishes a standardized operational framework to ensure sauna use occurs within clearly defined procedures that prioritize firefighter safety and emergency response readiness.

1.4 Policy Statement

Sauna use within fire department facilities should be considered a voluntary recovery activity conducted at the discretion of individual firefighters and subject to the operational procedures outlined within this SOP. Firefighters utilizing sauna equipment must adhere to all safety procedures, participation guidelines, and operational readiness requirements described within this document. At no time should sauna use interfere with a firefighter's ability to immediately respond to emergency incidents. Company officers should retain authority to restrict sauna use when operational readiness may be compromised.

1.5 Equipment Acquisition and Installation Authorization

The procedures established within this SOP apply to all sauna equipment located within fire department facilities regardless of how the equipment was obtained or when it was installed. No sauna unit should be made available for personnel use within a fire department facility until the authorization and pre-activation requirements established in this section have been satisfied. Departments that currently operate sauna equipment installed prior to adoption of this SOP should complete the applicable requirements of this section as a condition of continued program operation.

1.5.1 Authorization Requirement

Acquisition or acceptance of sauna equipment for installation within a fire department facility should require prior written authorization from the Fire Chief or designated authority. No sauna equipment should be installed, placed into service, or made available for personnel use on the basis of informal approval, verbal authorization, or member advocacy alone. The Fire Chief's written authorization should confirm that the department intends to govern the equipment under a written SOP and that the pre-activation requirements described in this section will be completed before personnel access is granted.

1.5.2 Code Compliance and Installation Inspection

Prior to the first use of any newly installed or newly acquired sauna unit, the department should verify that the installation complies with applicable electrical, building, and fire safety codes. Electrical installation should be inspected by a qualified electrician or authorized building official before the unit is energized for personnel use. Where local jurisdictional requirements apply, the department should obtain any required permits or inspections before making the equipment available. The results of the installation inspection and any code compliance documentation should be retained as part of the department's sauna program records. Departments should not place sauna equipment into service on the basis of manufacturer warranty, prior use at another facility, or the assumption that a donated or transferred unit is code compliant. Each installation should be independently verified within the department's facility before use begins.

1.5.3 Evaluation of Donated and Transferred Equipment

Sauna equipment received through donation, surplus transfer, or other non-procurement channels should be subject to the same authorization and inspection requirements as purchased equipment. Prior to accepting donated or transferred sauna equipment for installation, the department should evaluate the condition of the unit, confirm that safety features including temperature controls, automatic shutoff systems, and heater guards are present and functional, verify that electrical components are compatible with the facility's power systems, and determine that the unit can be installed and operated in compliance with applicable codes and the requirements of this SOP. Equipment that cannot be verified as safe, code-compliant, and fully functional should not be accepted for installation regardless of its source or condition as represented by the donating party. The Sauna Coordinator, in coordination with the Fire Chief, should be responsible for completing the evaluation of donated or transferred equipment prior to acceptance.

1.5.4 SOP Communication Prior to First Use

This SOP should be adopted by the department and communicated to all personnel with access to the sauna facility before the equipment is made available for use. Personnel who will be authorized to use the sauna should complete the orientation described in Section 6.5 and should submit a signed participation acknowledgment form in accordance with Appendix A prior to their first session. The department should not permit personnel access to sauna facilities until orientation has been completed and acknowledgment documentation has been collected for all intended users.

The requirement that this SOP precedes personnel access is not administrative formality. Sauna exposure produces measurable cardiovascular and thermoregulatory stress, and personnel who have not received instruction regarding safe operating parameters, eligibility requirements, and heat illness recognition may be at increased risk of adverse events during use. Governance must precede access.

1.5.5 Pre-Activation Documentation

Before any sauna unit is placed into service within a department facility, the Sauna Coordinator should complete and retain a pre-activation record confirming that each of the following has been satisfied: written authorization from the Fire Chief has been obtained, installation inspection and code compliance verification have been completed, any required permits or inspections have been obtained and documented, evaluation of donated or transferred equipment has been completed where applicable, this SOP has been formally adopted by the department, and personnel orientation and acknowledgment documentation requirements have been met for all authorized users. The pre-activation record should be retained as a permanent record within the department's sauna program documentation and should be made available upon request during program review or administrative audit.

APPENDIX C: Monthly Maintenance Log

FIRE STATION SAUNA — MONTHLY MAINTENANCE INSPECTION				
Department:	Station:	Month / Year:	Inspector:	
1 · ELECTRICAL AND HEATING				
Inspection Item	OK	Deficiency	N/A	Notes
Electrical connections — no damage or exposed wiring	☐	☐	☐	
Heater guards and protective barriers intact	☐	☐	☐	
Thermostat and temperature controls functional	☐	☐	☐	
Temperature display readable and accurate	☐	☐	☐	
Automatic shutoff system operational	☐	☐	☐	
2 · INTERIOR WOOD SURFACES				
Inspection Item	OK	Deficiency	N/A	Notes
Benches — no splintering, cracking, warping, or instability	☐	☐	☐	
Wall panels and backrests — no moisture damage or staining	☐	☐	☐	
Floor — dry, clean, and free of slip hazards	☐	☐	☐	
3 · MOISTURE AND VENTILATION				
Inspection Item	OK	Deficiency	N/A	Notes
No mold, mildew, or persistent odor observed	☐	☐	☐	
Ventilation openings clear and unobstructed	☐	☐	☐	
4 · CLEANING COMPLIANCE				
Inspection Item	OK	Deficiency	N/A	Notes
Only approved cleaning solutions in use (no bleach, ammonia, or solvents)	☐	☐	☐	
Routine post-use cleaning being performed consistently	☐	☐	☐	
5 · DOCUMENTATION CHECK				
Inspection Item	OK	Deficiency	N/A	Notes
Weekly inspection checklists completed for all intervening weeks	☐	☐	☐	
No unresolved deficiencies from prior monthly inspection	☐	☐	☐	
DEFICIENCIES IDENTIFIED — CORRECTIVE ACTION REQUIRED				
Deficiency / Location	Corrective Action		Assigned To	Due Date
SAUNA STATUS FOLLOWING INSPECTION				
☐ In Service — no deficiencies requiring removal	☐ Out of Service — pending corrective action	☐ Returned to Service — date: _____		
SIGN-OFF				
Inspector Signature:				Date:

Post Fireground Participation Screening

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**Just returned from a call.
Can I use the sauna?**

Have I completed formal incident rehabilitation procedures as required by the department?

No

**Complete rehab.
Then re-screen**

Yes

Was this active interior structural fire suppression or other high intensity fireground work?

No

No Suppression

Yes

Has a minimum of 60 minutes elapsed since end of active fireground operations?

No

Wait, re-screen after 60 minutes

Yes

Am I still experiencing dizziness, headache, nausea, or excessive fatigue from the call?

Yes

Wait, re-screen after 60 minutes

No

Have I completed personal decontamination and showered following the call?

No

Decon and shower, then re-screen

Yes

Have I consumed at least 16 oz. of water since returning from the call?

No

Wait, re-screen after 60 minutes

Yes

Have I notified my company officer and confirmed another person is aware I am entering?

No

Wait, re-screen after 60 minutes

Yes

Do I understand that post-call sauna use should follow conservative parameters (1 round, ≤ 5 min)?

No

Wait, re-screen after 60 minutes

Yes

**Cleared to proceed.
Follow operating procedures — Success**

Re-screen using Post-fireground Participation Screening