

Number of Ground Zero responders with 9/11-linked cancers hits 3,700

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The rising toll of Ground Zero responders and others afflicted with 9/11-linked cancers has hit 3,700.

The staggering tally of those suffering cancers certified by the feds as 9/11-related includes FDNY members (1,100), cops and other Ground Zero responders (2,134), and survivors such as downtown workers and residents (467). Many have more than one type of cancer.

The FDNY's chief medical officer, Dr. David Prezant, said over 2,100 firefighters and EMS personnel have retired on disability with World Trade Center-related illnesses, mostly lung disease and cancer, since 9/11.

"Due to the physical nature of their jobs, these illnesses have had a tremendous impact on our membership and their families," he said in a statement.

The grim toll includes 109 FDNY responders who have died from WTC-linked illnesses, 44 of them from cancer.

Research has found thyroid, colon, prostate and blood cancers more prevalent among FDNY members who served at Ground Zero than those who did not, a spokesman said.

FDNY Deputy Chief Thomas Riley, 58, came down with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, a blood cancer. But in a rare twist, it formed a tumor behind his right eye.

"That was a shock to the gut," he told The Post.

On 9/11, the veteran firefighter was on vacation at home in Long Island. He rushed to his Jackson Heights firehouse, Ladder 154, Engine 307, and led his troops to Ground Zero. They dug for survivors until 3 a.m. and returned every morning that week.

"All day long, you had debris flying in your eyes. You were constantly rinsing your eyes," Riley said. He toiled on the pit for months in the search for remains.

Last December, after bouts of fatigue and friends noticing his eye looked droopy, doctors diagnosed a lymphatic orbital mass. On medical leave, he has undergone a biopsy and radiation to shrink the tumor. But the treatments left his eye vulnerable to bright light, dust and wind. He carries drops to cope with pain.

The married dad of three will need lifetime check-ups every six months in case the cancer returns or spreads to his other eye.

Riley and other responders lobbied Congress last month to urge an extension of the 9/11 Victim Compensation Fund, which ensures medical treatment for Ground Zero responders and others exposed to the toxic dust and smoke.