

Mesa Fire's Recharge Room combines 3 therapies into 1 recovery system

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The model blends red light therapy, infrared sauna and cold immersion into a synergistic system designed to support firefighter health

Mesa Fire & Medical Department's new Recharge Room is a dedicated area at one station with a set of three therapies that can be accomplished in 35 minutes.

*Photo/Mesa Fire & Medical Department
By Scott Figgins*

Firefighting is one of the most demanding and hazardous professions in the world. But the hazards of the job extend far beyond the dangers commonly associated with fighting fire, particularly those related to fire ground operations. There are also high-stress incidents, disruption in sleep patterns due to long shifts, continuous physical strain and exposure to communicable diseases. These hazards can accumulate over the course of a career, contributing to increased risks of cardiovascular, perivascular and pulmonary diseases, as well as various cancers, behavioral health challenges and musculoskeletal injuries.

While many fire department leaders and organizations recognize the need for proactive health initiatives and strategies, limited budgets and resources often force them to choose operational needs over funding wellness programs. Additionally, the abundance of available wellness-related programs can make it difficult to determine where to begin. Most agencies already invest in annual medical and fitness evaluations ([NFPA 1582](#)), have costly policies and procedures to help reduce hazardous risks, and even allocate budget dollars to address mental wellness through resiliency and peer support programs. Consequently, there is often little money remaining to support additional wellness solutions that can impact our firefighters' health and wellbeing.



Mesa Fire & Medical Department's new Recharge Room is a dedicated area at one station with a set of three therapies that can be accomplished in 35 minutes. - Photo/Mesa Fire & Medical Department

Mesa Fire & Medical Department tackled this challenge through a new Recharge Room for its members – a dedicated area at one station with a set of three therapies that can be accomplished in 35 minutes. The Recharge Rooms are designed to help members reduce burnout, enhance recovery and build resilience.

Recharge Room origin story

While there are several wellness-based therapies available today, most are independent of each another, not used in combination as a multi-modality, synergistic approach to total wellness. This is the idea behind the Recharge Room, the brainchild of [Positive Impact Alliance](#). With a mission to improve the total wellbeing of those who carry the greatest weight – first responders, educators and other public servants working in high-stress, high-impact roles – the Recharge Room utilizes evidence-based therapies already widely used in athletic training, high-performance professions and rehabilitation settings. For firefighters, this wellness approach provides a dedicated space to help their bodies recover from the intense physical and mental demands of the job while also reducing chronic inflammation associated with respiratory diseases, stroke, heart disease, obesity and cancer.

Core components of the Recharge Room

Each of the therapies included in the Recharge Room provides unique benefits individually, but when combined into one structured, intentional space, they create a powerful synergistic effect. This is the foundation of the Recharge Room – to combining 10 minutes of red-light therapy with simultaneous vagus nerve stimulation, followed by 15-20 minutes of infrared sauna therapy, concluding with 2-5 minutes of cold-water immersion therapy.



1. Red light therapy (photobiomodulation):

Red light therapy uses specific wavelengths of light to stimulate cellular energy production and reduce inflammation. For firefighters who have been surveyed, red light therapy was shown to:

- Support muscle recovery after physically demanding calls;
- Reduce joint pain and stiffness;
- Enhance circulation and tissue repair; and
- Improve sleep quality, which is critical for shift workers.

Because it is non-invasive and quick, firefighters can use red light therapy off-duty, post fire or major incident as well as post-shift recovery. While completing red light therapy, users also wear a pair of headphones that combines audio with bilateral auricular vagus nerve stimulation. This disrupts the brain/body “fight or flight” signal and results in a calming effect.

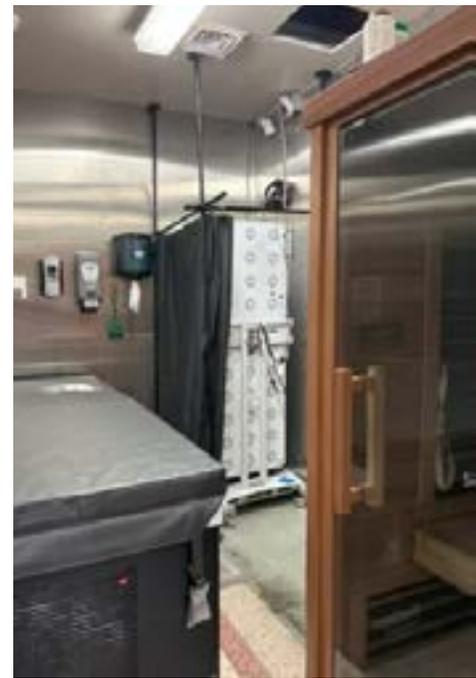


2. Infrared sauna:

Infrared saunas use targeted heat to gently raise core body temperature, promoting deep relaxation and detoxification. Key benefits include:

- Increased cardiovascular conditioning, similar to mild exercise;
- Possible detoxification, helping the body process toxins encountered on the job;
- Reduced stress hormones, promoting mental wellness; and
- Eased muscle tightness and improved flexibility.

With cancer risks and cardiovascular strain at the forefront of firefighter health concerns, the sauna provides a supportive tool aligned with prevention-focused wellness strategies.



Photo/Mesa Fire & Medical Department



3. Cold plunge therapy:

Cold immersion has surged in popularity due to its measurable effects on recovery and resilience. For firefighters, cold plunge benefits include:

- Rapid decrease in inflammation and swelling;
- Improved circulation and vascular function;
- Boosted mood and mental clarity through epinephrine and nor-epinephrine release; and
- Potential strengthening of the autonomic nervous system, aiding stress management.

As part of the Recharge Room cycle, cold immersion helps the body reset after heat exposure and provides a grounding mental reset after stressful incidents.

Support for the Recharge Room

Support and funding for the Recharge Room was the result of a collaborative and coordinated effort amongst multiple stakeholders. Originating with MFMD's Health and Safety Committee members who were passionate about the benefits and advancing through MFMD's Labor Management process, the project brought together key partners, including Rich Ganley (founder of the PIA's Recharge Room), the city manager, Resource Management, City Facilities and MFMD's wellness captain. This collaborative approach allowed us to identify the most strategic fire station locations to kick off the program with the necessary funding – from the Wellness Division's cancer prevention budget – to establish three fully equipped Recharge Rooms. This was not an easy task. Of the three locations initially considered, only one made the final cut. Various elements were taken into consideration: availability of usable space, need for electricity, closest water supply and drainage, the accessibility of Recharge Room components and remodeling costs to make it all work. Fortunately, our two new MFMD fire stations that are being built (Stations 223 and 224) have been designed with Recharge Rooms in mind, due in large part to the incredibly positive feedback we have already received from our firefighters. Station 224 is scheduled to open in mid- to late-2026, and Station 223 sometime thereafter. Considering the low overall cost and the

plethora of health benefits that can be realized with the Recharge Rooms, MFMD will continue to make it a priority to include them in fire stations and rebuilds in the future.

Final thoughts

With nearly 75% of firefighter line-of-duty deaths attributed to cancer, proactive interventions are essential. Focusing on firefighter health and wellness through strategies like the Recharge Room is about protecting those who protect us each and every day. With most of our firefighters reporting reductions in pain, inflammation and stress, plus improvements in mood, muscle recovery and sleep, the Recharge Room is clearly a cost-effective way to improve health and wellness while also allowing our firefighters to maintain operational readiness for years to come.

About the Author

Scott Figgins is a captain and paramedic with the Mesa (Arizona) Fire & Medical Department and president of IAFF Local 2260. He has over 20 years with MFMD and served as the department's wellness captain from 2018 to 2022. Over the years Figgins has worked to support cancer legislation, cancer screenings, cancer victims, and improve cancer education and prevention strategies, such as preliminary exposure reduction, clean cab, rehabilitation sector and MFMD's Recharge Rooms.

To view the article online: <https://www.firerescue1.com/health-wellness/mesa-fires-recharge-room-combines-3-therapies-into-1-recovery-system>

**RECHARGE
ROOM**
by the Positive Impact Alliance