

April 9, 2003

**POLICY CHANGE TO VA HANDBOOK 5005
RECRUITMENT AND APPOINTMENT OF FIREFIGHTERS**

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Notice implements section 3307(d) of Title 5, United States Code that establishes provisions for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to determine and fix the maximum entry age for an original appointment as a firefighter.

2. BACKGROUND

a. Firefighters are covered under a special retirement program that provides for early retirement as well as establishing a mandatory separation age for firefighters. Currently, the mandatory separation age for firefighters having completed 20 years of service is age 57, and firefighters are eligible for retirement at age 50 with 20 years of credible Federal fire service time. Only the head of the Agency may exempt an employee from automatic separation until that employee becomes 60 years of age.

b. The mandatory retirement age does not apply to individuals who have not yet completed 20 years of credible Federal fire service time. Accordingly, an individual hired at age 50 could, in theory, work in the fire service until age 70, while an individual hired at age 25 could retire at age 50 and would be forced to retire at age 57.

3. CHANGE TO POLICY: It is VHA policy that the following entry age requirements must be implemented for filling all future vacancies in the General Schedule (GS)-081 job series.

a. For initial appointments, applicants cannot have reached their 37th birthday by the day of appointment.

b. Applicants who have passed the designated entry age limit noted, but who have previously served in a covered position, may be eligible to re-enter the fire service provided that they:

(1) Meet all applicable qualifications for the position; and

(2) Will be able to complete a total of 20 years of covered and creditable Federal firefighter service by the time the Federal firefighter reaches the age of 57. Prior service in covered positions and creditable towards retirement may be subtracted from the applicant's age to determine if the Federal firefighter meets the maximum entry age.

4. RESCISSION: This Notice rescinds VHA Notice 2002-02, dated February 15, 2002. This VHA Notice expires April 30, 2007.

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Under Secretary for Health

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