

Boston 25 News

Local woman looks to fire departments to help raise awareness for rare disease

By Jim Morelli

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DRACUT, Mass. - It is considered a rare disease, unless, of course, you have it. For Paula Corey of Dracut, erythromelalgia became something she struggled with every day.

"It feels like you're burning on fire," Corey said. "Like your foot's on top of coals."

Corey first noticed those symptoms eight years ago when her toes turned red and hot after showering.

"I thought, 'well that's kind of strange, why are they red?'" Corey remembers. "Didn't think much about it the first time, but when it happened numerous times I brought it to the doctor's attention."

Over the next five years, things got worse. By the time she was diagnosed with erythromelalgia, both of Corey's feet and hands were affected.

"There are a lot of us that don't know why we have it," Corey said. "And no one's looking for that reason."

But Corey has an idea to get everybody looking at the disease that feels like fire: red lights on every fire station in Massachusetts during the month of May.

"It would go global," she said. "Someone would pick it up and say, 'look what's happening in the state of Massachusetts, all the fire stations are lighting up red.'"

The idea is ever-so-slowly picking up steam with three departments signed on so far, including Dracut and Milford.

Milford's Fire Chief told Boston 25 News the department is participating in the EM Awareness campaign because there's a family in town dealing with the disorder. In fact, the department hosted that family last week and it's encouraging other departments, now and in future Mays, to go red.

"If it worked out next May, the first week of May every station would be lit up red," Corey said. "By the second week it would hit the news."