

# THE RURAL FIREFIGHTER

Issue 03-08—August 2008



Nebraska Forest Service

www.nfs.unl.edu

## The Nebraska Incident Qualifications System Clearing up some of the mystery behind "The Red Card"

The red card system is not just the way a person can go "fight the big ones" on federal land. It is also a family of courses and corresponding certification that can be applied to wildland firefighting on a local fire district. In this issue, we'll try to clear up some red card mysteries.

### Your Wildland Fire "Drivers License"

The red card is an illustration of an individual's qualifications. It shows that a person has completed course work, training and on-the-job performance required of a position. It's part of the system used by most fire management agencies to track fire certification. All firefighters assigned to a federal incident are required to have one.

### How to Get a Red Card

The steps to obtain a red card and progress upward are outlined in the Wildland Fire Qualification System Guide, also known by its Publications Management System (PMS) number, 310-1, available on the Internet at <http://www.nwccg.gov/pms/pms.htm>. Pay extra attention to the first 30 pages, as they provide a detailed description of the system.

### National Wildfire Coordinating Group Courses

All National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) courses are categorized by a 4-5 character identifier such as S-190. The first one or two characters designate the type of course. The nine types of courses are: dispatch (D), fire investigation (FI), incident command (I), leadership (L), management (M), prevention (P), refresher training (RT), prescribed fire (RX) and suppression skills (S). A complete description of each course

can be found in the Field Managers Course Guide, PMS 901-1, also available on the Internet.

### Steps to Certification

Certification starts by taking three classes: S-130 Firefighter Training, S-190 Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior and L-180 Human Factors on the Fireline. These courses are usually offered as a single class. Field work and fire shelter deployment practice are part of the course.

I-100, Introduction to ICS is also required. This course is equivalent to IS-100, the FEMA/Homeland Security course required of all persons involved with emergency planning, response or recovery. If you have taken IS-100, you do not need to take I-100 again.

The final step is to pass the fitness test. PMS

310-1 states, "Personnel must meet established physical fitness levels. Agencies may determine the method of evaluating physical fitness. The testing method should be a measurable evaluation process." Depending on your fireline assignment, there are three levels of testing: light, moderate and arduous. Line firefighters are required to pass the arduous-level test (the "pack" test): a three-mile walk with a 45-pound pack in under 45 minutes. In Nebraska, the authority having jurisdiction (fire chief, agency administrator) determines the fitness standard for their personnel. The red card is valid for one year from the date of the pack test.

When the basic steps are completed (courses, shelter deployment, fitness testing) this information,

*continued on next page*

**FIRE CHIEF!!**  
**PLEASE POST THE RURAL FIREFIGHTER**  
**IN A PROMINENT LOCATION! WE ARE**  
**ALWAYS SURPRISED THAT SO MANY NEBRASKA**  
**FIREFIGHTERS HAVE NEVER SEEN THIS**  
**PUBLICATION, IN SPITE OF THE FACT THAT IT**  
**HAS BEEN IN PRINT FOR ALMOST 40 YEARS!**  
**AS THE OLD SAYING GOES "KNOWLEDGE NOT**  
**SHARED IS KNOWLEDGE WASTED!"**  
**HELP SHARE THE KNOWLEDGE!**

UNIVERSITY OF  
**Nebraska**

Nebraska Forest Service  
103 Entomology Hall  
Lincoln, NE 68583-0815  
402.472.2944  
402.472.2964 (FAX)

### Wildland Fire Protection Program

**Don Westover**  
Program Leader  
402.472.6629

**Sandy Lineberry**  
Staff Assistant  
402.472.6623

**Bob Vogltance**  
Fire Prevention  
402.372.5665

**George Teixeira**  
Fire Resource Manager  
402.472.5870

**John Overstreet**  
Western Fire Specialist  
308.432.3179

**Lew Sieber**  
Equipment Manager  
402.624.8061

**Jess Yahne**  
Forest Fuels Specialist  
402.376.3241

**Casey McCoy**  
Fire Training Manager  
402.472.6634



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enhancing and utilizing Nebraska's tree and forest Resources*



South Dakota and southwest Wyoming. An expected weakening of La Nina conditions in June, and the possibility of an end to the La Nina pattern during the second half of summer, could result in the driest conditions in the Rocky Mountain region. Also, weather experts predict above average temperatures will become more widespread in July and August over this area. Weather patterns are predicted to support windier conditions than average through the early summer.



Given all of this, fire service professionals predict average fire potential from mid June through October, which means that these areas will likely experience short periods of fuel and fire weather conditions that support large fire activity. Also, pre-frontal weather (windy, warm and dry) will offer periods of extreme burning conditions and natural ignition (lightning) becomes a factor in late June through August.

Lightening is concerning because often times, especially in timber country, fire will smolder for several hours following the strike before it actually erupts into flames. When lightning strikes, the fire often lies hidden until the grass, pine needles and fallen timber dry out. When the fire then erupts, it is often long after there is any apparent threat of fire due to the lightning. Area landowners and residents are asked to keep this in mind and reminded to check for the possibility of fires long after the threat seems to have passed.

These conditions combined with the ever increasing record-high fuel prices are causing fire department supervisory personnel increased levels of stress. There is a delicate balance to be maintained. One must be able to respond with sufficient equipment to effectively and expeditiously suppress the fire and protect property but yet not over tax the limited resources and budgets available.

Fire prevention is very important. Given the

predicted patterns over the coming months, area fire service personnel encourage everyone to use extreme caution.

- Remember there is an open burning ban in effect.
- Be extremely careful with open flame or tools that emit sparks.
- Never leave a fire unattended.
- Use caution with smoking materials.
- Do not park vehicles on dry grass.
- Be cautious of tall grass and catalytic converters.
- Carefully maintain vehicles/equipment.

If you know of or suspect there is a wildfire, contact your local fire department immediately. The more information you can provide the better.

- Location of the fire. The more exact you can be the faster the response can be.
- Size.
- What type of material is burning.
- Best access.

Rushville Volunteer Fire Department  
P.O. Box 498  
Rushville, NE 69360-0498



### **Adding New Life to a Fire Prevention Program**

Try one or more of the following:

- Have Smokey visit your local senior center, nursing home and hospital.
- Plan a booth at your county fair.
- Paint prevention tips on park benches.

## **CELEBRATE! AUGUST 9, 2008**

**Smokey Bear will be 64 years young!**

**Plan a birthday celebration at the station with cake and drinks for all the friends of Smokey in your community.**

- Invite farmers and ranchers to attend and/or speak at your fire prevention co-operative meetings.
- Write a newsletter to farmers/ranchers giving fire prevention tips for fall harvest.
- Mail fire prevention materials to farmers and ranchers on alternatives to burning.

- Conduct fire prevention seminars for parents and babysitters.
  - Post fire prevention signs near fire pits and grills at campsites and parks.
  - Conduct fire prevention block parties in various neighborhoods.
  - Conduct a fire prevention poster contest at the start of the school year.
  - Present prevention programs at local organizations (Kiwanis, PTA, Rotary, Knights of Columbus or women's organizations).
  - Have a meeting for farmers and ranchers at the fire station to discuss clean up around the farm/ranch and tips for fall harvest. Invite local implement dealers too.
  - Work with your local radio stations to have 15- to 30-second fire prevention spots done by local firefighters.
- The list of fire prevention activities is endless. If you do just one of these ideas this quarter, I will be proud of you. Better yet, you will have delivered a very important message to the folks in your community.
- Bob E. Vogltance, fire resource manager  
Prevention/Public Fire Education



### **Thunderstorm Safety Alert**

*Courtesy NWCG Safety & Health Working Team, July 2008*  
Within a 30-day period during May and June 2008, 10 wildland firefighters were injured after being struck by lightning. Two were hit on a prescribed fire in Montana, eight others were struck in North Carolina. Thunderstorms continue to be predicted in most of the west.

Clearly, lightning is a hazard in the wildland fire environment—one that will always have potential to injure or kill firefighters. Firefighters can take actions to mitigate this hazard. Observe the 30/30 rule: If you see lightning and hear thunder within 30 seconds of each other, take storm countermeasures. Do not resume work in exposed areas until 30 minutes after storm activity has passed. Other countermeasures include:

- Take shelter in a vehicle if possible.
- If outdoors, find a low spot away from tall trees, wire fences, utility lines and other elevated conductive objects.
- If in the woods, move to an area with shorter trees.
- If in open country, crouch low, minimizing contact with the ground. Never lie flat.
- Don't group together.

### **Sandy's Corner**

For a change, I don't have much to write about because all of you are doing such a good job. Very few errors are found anymore with online reporting. You've got that down pat, and I thank you. Occasionally, we have a "glitch" in the program, but overall it is going well.

I would still like to encourage those not reporting online to give it a try; however, if that is not possible, just a few suggestions.

1) If you're behind in reporting no response, enter all of them on one card, e.g., no fires for April, May. Postage continues to climb and this helps considerably.

2) If you are behind in reporting, or don't know when you last reported, please give me a call. I'll be glad to check your records and at the same time enter all the "no responses" online at the same time.

3) Again, one piece of tape is sufficient when you mail back the card. Duct tape is good for a lot of things, but not for sealing a yellow card. :)

4) Don't forget to update changes to your fire chief and the president and secretary/treasurer of your rural board.

Hope all of you are having a good year. Winter will be here before you know it, so enjoy the warm weather while you can. 'Til next time... Sandy



### **Fire Reporting Online The Rest of the Story**

Most of you are now reporting wildfires online and feedback has been good. We appreciate getting this information from you. But did you notice there is a lot of information for you on this same website?

Next time you visit, click "View Approved Reports." You'll see a table of the wildfires you have reported since 2000. You can sort the table in ascending or descending order by date, cause or total acres. To sort, click on one of the gray rectangles in the column headings. Next time you need a report for your rural board, mutual aid district or fire prevention program, this information could be useful.



Want to see a map of your wildfires? Try this—click on "View Approved Reports" then select either "Standard Map" or "Map by Cause" from the line above the table headings. You will see a map of the wildfires on your district. Latitude and longitude information is only available since January 2007, so we can't go back

before this time. In the future, however, as you report more and more wildfires, the map may begin to reveal trends about fire occurrence in your district—useful information for you. Think planning, equipment location, response times and fire prevention.

### **Nugget of the Day**

"The strength of the wolf is in the pack,  
The strength of the pack is in the wolf."  
– Rudyard Kipling



### **VFA Deadline Looming VFA project completion deadline August 15, 2008**

If you were awarded cost share from the Volunteer Fire Assistance program, this is a friendly reminder that the deadline is approaching. Please complete your projects and send me your delivery invoices so that we can process your award. If you anticipate having trouble with the deadline, please call Don at (402) 472-6629.



### **Calendar of Events**

- Oct 5-11 Fire Prevention Week
- Oct 12 Fallen Firefighters Memorial, North Platte
- Oct 16-18 Nebraska State Volunteer Firefighters Association Annual Conference, North Platte

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Nebraska Forest Service  
103 Entomology Hall  
Lincoln, NE 68583-0815