

# THE RURAL FIREFIGHTER

Issue 03-14—Aug 2014



Nebraska Forest Service

## Learning from the Call: After Action Reviews

A Nebraska fire department has just suppressed a 20-acre grass fire and is packaging up hose lays. While the hose lays were effective in fire suppression, a few firefighters see how they could have laid the hose more effectively. A rookie firefighter was part of the tender/water supply operation supporting the hose lay, but he has questions about how the operation transpired. His innovative mind even has an idea of how to make it more effective in the future, but his rookie status has him intimidated to bring it up in front of the veterans. The mutual aid department was also not fully informed on their task as they were not able to raise effective communication with the Incident Commander of the fire. Despite these issues, the fire was safely and effectively extinguished and the departments returned home. However, the incident is not discussed again until their monthly meeting three weeks later and many of these concerns and ideas are forgotten.



How many times has this situation occurred on Nebraska wildfires? Teachable moments, innovative ideas and positive team building opportunities are missed. The call may be discussed later at a meeting but the details and passion of the call are gone from the firefighters' memory. However, there is a positive and easy solution to solving this issue

which provides each firefighter a voice in identifying what did or did not occur during the incident and why. This process is called an After Action Review (AAR).

AARs are most effective when performed immediately—at the incident or after returning to the station. A leader should be selected to facilitate the discussion. This facilitator does not have to be the chief, in fact selecting a rookie to facilitate can help ease tension and promote young firefighters' leadership skills. An essential piece to the AAR is that they must have a positive atmosphere. A positive atmosphere will encourage discussion from

each member of the AAR and help bring your department together. Negative or confrontational events may have transpired during the call but the negative tension is not the focus of the AAR. Focus on what occurred and how it can be improved for the next call, not calling out who may be to blame.

Now that a facilitator has been identified, he/she must encourage participation while asking the simple questions:

- What was planned?
- What actually happened?
- Why did it happen?
- What can we do better next time?

UNIVERSITY OF  
**Nebraska**  
Lincoln

Nebraska Forest Service  
102 Forestry Hall  
Lincoln, NE 68583-0815  
402-472-2944  
402-472-2964 (FAX)

### Wildland Fire Protection Program

**Don Westover**  
Program Leader  
402-472-6629

**Mike Morgan**  
Office Assistant  
402-472-2733

**Lew Sieber**  
Equipment Manager  
402-624-8061

**Casey McCoy**  
Fire Training Manager  
402-472-6634

**Seth Peterson**  
Fire Management  
Specialist - Chadron  
308-432-6132

**Vacant**  
Fire Management  
Specialist - Valentine  
402-376-1485



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These questions break the ice for insightful discussion leading to greater understanding for everyone on the incident. Looking back at the example, the rookie will have a positive atmosphere to discuss tender operation while also being able to discuss new ideas. The members who implemented the hose lay may discuss what their plan was and alternative operational plans that may have been more effective. Finally, as with most incidents, the discussion of the failure in communication between firefighters and the mutual aid department can be resolved.

The initial plan for all fires is to extinguish the fire in a safe way which will return all firefighters home. What actually happens in that process is often a hectic scenario where many micro and macro decisions are made by not only the Incident Commander, but each firefighter. By conducting a positive and encouraging AAR, a clear picture can be created for why decisions were made and what the positive or negative implications were for that decision. By casting a positive light on what was done right during the call and identifying what you can do better on the next call, your department can continually improve and achieve your fire department’s main goal—returning all firefighters home, while safely and effectively working as a department to accomplish goals on your incident.



## VFA Update

Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) is an annual cost share funding program administered by the Nebraska Forest Service (NFS). Nebraska fire departments with a current cooperative agreement are eligible to receive up to 50 percent of eligible expenses.

In 2014, NFS received 142 project

applications. An interagency committee scored project applications. Almost 65 percent of the applications received were approved, but some were funded at less than 50 percent due to the limited nature of the funding.

As in years past, the need far outweighs funding available. The total cost of all projects submitted was \$983,449. For approved projects:

- Total costs \$607,939
- Total funds requested \$267,486
- Total approved amount \$187,112

Applicants were notified of their project status in June. Those fire departments receiving awards have until Sept. 15, 2014 to return necessary documentation of purchases.

### Bonus Points Available in 2015

Contingent upon federal funding, VFA will again be available in 2015. Applications are mailed in February with *The Rural Firefighter*. Next year, one change will be made in application scoring. Evaluators will award bonus points to applications from fire departments that are current on monthly wildfire reports for the previous year. For example, a fire department that has submitted 12 months of wildfire reports to NFS will earn the maximum

bonus points. If a department has not yet reported 2014 fires, it’s easy to go back to the beginning of the year and file a report. There is also an area to report that



there were no wildfires, ensuring the application receives reporting points. For additional information contact Don Westover or visit [nfs.unl.edu/wildland-fire-protection](http://nfs.unl.edu/wildland-fire-protection) and click the links on the right side of the page.



## Happy 70th Smokey!

Smokey Bear has been called one of the most successful advertising campaigns of the last century.

Advertising Age, a magazine that focuses on news, information and analysis of marketing and the media, ranked Smokey’s “Only You . . .” at number 26, ahead of other heavyweights like Snap, Crackle and Pop and the Energizer Bunny.



Smokey turns 70 years old this year. Here are a few ways to help Smokey Bear celebrate 70 years.

Visit Smokey’s website—[smokeybear.adcouncil.org](http://smokeybear.adcouncil.org)—for a great collection of information, graphics, videos and other resources to make your local celebration even better.

Also, be sure not to miss Smokey Bear’s 70th birthday party at the **Nebraska Firefighters Museum & Education Center** in Kearney on Aug. 9. You can also take advantage of an opportunity to view the Smokey Bear Collection by Rudolph Wendelin, on display at the museum throughout the summer. The Collection is a traveling art print exhibit sponsored in part by the National Agricultural Library and the U.S. Forest Service. The Nebraska Firefighters Museum & Education Center was the first institution to display these prints this summer.



## Where's My Red Card?

You made the commitment and stayed to the end of a long class, yet no red card has made its way to you. Before you start making calls or inventing new curse words, check the steps below for ideas on why a card could be delayed.

Step One: Firefighter Type 2 (FFT2) certification requires **4 classes**: S-130, S-190, L-180 and IS-100. In addition to course completion, records need to be established in the Nebraska Incident Qualification System (IQS) database managed by the Nebraska Forest Service (NFS). As with other states, the Nebraska IQS isn't connected to other certification databases. If your courses were presented by an agency other than NFS, ask your training provider if the information was shared with NFS.

Step Two: Pass the **annual fitness test** and submit a copy of the record to NFS. Your fire chief/department can determine the fitness standard and the method of evaluating physical fitness, but it should be "a measurable evaluation process." NFS recommends fire department personnel strive to meet the national standard for line firefighters when possible (3 miles, 45 minutes, 45 pounds).



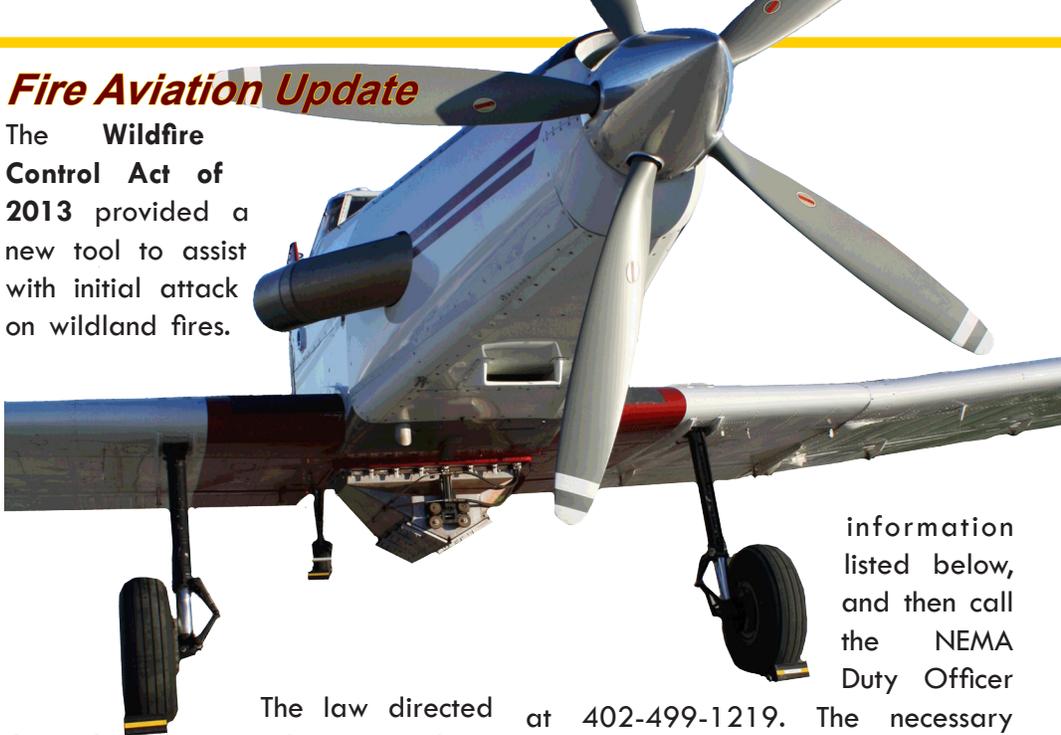
Step Three: Maintaining certification is straightforward. Annually, firefighters must complete a 4-hour **refresher course** and pass the pack test. If any of these requirements are missed in a given year, certification is not lost, but the red card will not be valid (if it is over one year old) until the requirements are met and submitted for IQS entry.

As always, if you have any questions, please let us know!



## Fire Aviation Update

The **Wildfire Control Act of 2013** provided a new tool to assist with initial attack on wildland fires.



The law directed the Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) to establish, maintain and staff single engine air tanker (SEAT) bases and the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to contract for a SEAT and provide retardant. Three bases are currently established and a fourth base is being developed. This new tool doesn't replace Nebraska's long standing aerial applicator program, but it does have a unique request and dispatch process.

The SEAT will be dispatched through the Great Plains Dispatch Center (GPC) in Rapid City, S.D., but only NEMA can make that call. BEFORE a request for SEAT support is made, some considerations should be made and information gathered.

1. A SEAT is the appropriate response for a wildfire burning forested lands or grasslands approaching forested land.
2. Local fire chiefs and incident commanders will first request local aerial applicators prior to requesting a SEAT unless the fire is out of control and burning forested land or running into forested land.
3. Costs for SEAT requests sent directly to GPC will be the responsibility of the requesting jurisdiction.
4. The local jurisdiction requesting the SEAT must first gather necessary

information listed below, and then call the NEMA Duty Officer

at 402-499-1219. The necessary information:

- a. Latitude and longitude for the fire,
- b. Radio frequency to be used for air to ground communications,
- c. Name and location of the individual who will be responsible for air to ground communications and who will direct retardant application.

5. If this information is not available from the fire scene, deployment of the SEAT will be delayed.

This information, and a brief form to capture it, is included within the 2014 Emergency Assistance for Wildfire Control guide (the Yellow Book). The publication is available on the NFS website at [nfs.unl.edu/fire-aviation](http://nfs.unl.edu/fire-aviation).

Nebraska's SEAT went online July 15 for a 60-day contract. Even though the Nebraska fire season has been moderate, long hot summer days can dry fuels quickly. NFS and NEMA recommend that fire departments become familiar with this new tool and the request process.

Plans also include using 2014 SEAT proficiency flights (when possible) as opportunities for firefighters to train in directing aerial drops. Notification of these opportunities could be short, so please keep your schedules as flexible as possible. Additional information will be released when available.



Nebraska Forest Service  
 102 Forestry Hall  
 Lincoln, NE 68583-0815

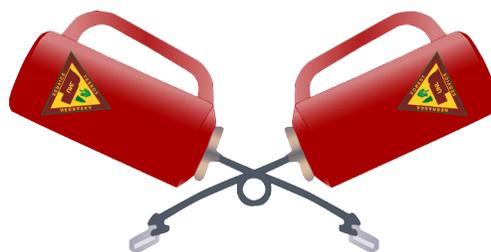
## Calendar of Events

- Aug 9 Happy Birthday  
Smokey Bear!
- Oct 16-18 Nebraska State  
Volunteer Firefighters  
Association Annual  
Conference, North  
Platte
- Feb 6-8 Les Lukert Winter  
Conference, Kearney
- Apr 11-19 Nebraska Wildland  
Fire Academy, Fort  
Robinson State Park
- Apr 20-25 Fire Department  
Instructors Conference,  
Indianapolis, IN
- May 15-17 Nebraska State Fire  
School, Grand Island

## Rx Fire Grants Available

In 2011, the Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) led an initiative securing funding to support prescribed (Rx) fire training.

Funding targets the development of local Rx fire expertise and strengthened landowner, fire department, NGO and government agency relationships.



The funding supports multi-agency efforts to expand training, accelerate certification, enhance capacity and expand the safe adoption of Rx fire.

Grants can reimburse Rx fire training expenses for in- and out-of-state training. Nebraska landowners,

students, agency/NGO staff and firefighters are eligible. Eligible expenses include meals, lodging, airfare, rental cars, mileage and registration/tuition. Grants have enabled students to attend Florida's Prescribed Fire Training Center, the Nebraska Wildland Fire Academy and the Colorado Wildfire Academy. In addition, planning is underway to offer RX-310 Introduction to Fire Effects for the first time ever in Nebraska at no cost with full reimbursement of expenses. Details will be released soon.

For more information, contact Casey McCoy at 402-472-6634 or [cmccoy3@unl.edu](mailto:cmccoy3@unl.edu).



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