

THE RURAL FIREFIGHTER

Issue 03-11—Aug 2011



Nebraska Forest Service

www.nfs.unl.edu

Tips From Tex - Training, Part I

How often does your fire department meet for training? Once a month? Twice a month? 3-4 times a month? Either way, it doesn't matter how often you meet, it's whether your training is effective and relevant. How often do the troops show up on training night only to find that due to a lack of planning, something got pulled out at the last minute and that's what they ended up doing that night? And 9 times out of 10, you stuck a video in the machine and watched something that was 10 years old. Or you had your people go look over the trucks and drive them a few miles.

If this is what's occurring at your department, let's take it a step further and ask, what is your training plan for new volunteers? Do you have one? Is your rookie training documented? To what standard are they being trained? Who is doing the training and what qualifies them to conduct the training?

Folks, these are questions that we all need to ask ourselves. Are we doing the right thing for our people and the taxpayers? Yep, taxpayers! Not only are they providing the funds for your equipment

and training, they will also be the first ones to sue should they feel that the fire department did something wrong and they, or their insurance company, can get some money from you.

This article has the potential to go on forever but my editor Casey only allows me so much space, so I'll focus on one area for now, and that's rookie training. If we do not have an established plan for our new firefighters, how can we expect them to know what to do when we need them? How

many departments give their new people pagers on day one? Why? What do they know about firefighting at that point? Unless the department's policy is that they respond to the station, become glued to an officer and do nothing else but stay with that officer during the call, I believe that the rookie is more of a hindrance and/or distraction at that point than an asset. I know some of you are saying that you need manpower or we don't have a lot of time to spend training them.

But here is the bottom line: By not training the new folks to a standard level, whatever that may be,



we are not only failing them, but their families and taxpayers as well. I would not want to be the fire chief who has to inform a family of a loss knowing it could have been prevented had that firefighter been trained properly. Or to make things worse, to have to inform them that the PSOB was denied because it had been determined that due to lack of training, the firefighter shouldn't have been involved in the emergency.

Now this article is not of the result of a wild hair (I know many of you are thinking that right now!). It's a result of visiting with departments across the state and discovering many of them DO NOT have a solid, organized rookie training program, if any at all. There have been incidents in other states where the main factor of the accident or fatality was lack of proper training. Some even suggested that sending new people to fire school

continued on next page

UNIVERSITY OF
Nebraska

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

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

Casey McCoy
Fire Training Manager
402.472.6634



“Tips From Tex” cont. from pg 1

for the 12 or minimum 9 hours of basic firefighter class is good enough for them.

I have a training plan, or job book if you will, that you can use as a training plan. You can tailor it to fit your department’s needs. Not only will it allow you to have a plan, it is also a way to document training received by an individual and who conducted the training.

As some of you have heard me say before, I believe that we—volunteer firefighters—need to develop and enforce our own firefighter standards before the federal government does it for us. I will be working with the Nebraska State Volunteer Firefighters Association (NSVFA) to propose a mandatory training program that can be presented at the NSVFA Annual Conference for discussion. Should there be a good response, I would ask that it be taken further and be presented to the legislature for development of state law.

I hope this has some of you thinking and discussing this with your department. We owe it to our taxpayers, the state of Nebraska and ourselves to be properly trained to do the job we volunteered to do. If you have any questions or would like me to come discuss the job book with you, give me a call or send me an email gteixeira2@unl.edu.

Footnote: Recently the National Fire Protection Association released their Third Needs Assessment of the U.S. Fire Service. Previously, this assessment was done in 2001 and 2005. In its recent findings, 46% of fire departments responded that they have not formally trained all their personnel involved in structural firefighting. On the wildland firefighting side, **68%** have not formally trained their personnel. Until next time, stay safe.

George J. (Tex) Teixeira II



Thanks Jess

Jess Yahnke, our Fuels Management Specialist stationed in Valentine, has accepted a position with the Washington Department of Natural Resources. In addition to her regular job, Jess dedicated countless hours to the Nebraska Wildland Fire Academy as well as other training courses. Good luck with the new job!

Changes to the Open Burning Statute

With the passage of LB 248 this spring, Nebraska firefighters should familiarize themselves with the changes to the state’s open burning law. Overall, the changes were minor, but they could impact the manner in which you issue burn permits.

First, all instances of the phrase “...his or her designee...” were removed. This phrase was used in conjunction with any reference



to the Fire Chief, enabling another person to share the load placed on the Chief.

During the Natural Resources Committee public hearing, however, the concern was raised that this designee was not required to be part of the fire department. To address this, new language was added under 81-520.03. It now says “The fire chief of a local fire department may designate a member of the local fire department to share the powers and duties of the fire chief under such sections, except adopting standards pursuant to subsection (4) of section 81-520.01.” The Chief may still designate someone to assist and issue burn permits, but the person must be a member of the fire department.

The second major change also came in section 81-520.03. The term “range-management burning” was stricken and replaced with “land-management burning.” The definition of this new term was also expanded to include not just “on land utilized for grazing,” but also land

used for “pasture, forests, or grassland to control weeds, pests, insects, and disease, prevent wildland fires, manage watersheds, care for windbreaks, and conduct scientific research.”

As the existing statute requires a burn plan be filed for any burns meeting this definition, the inclusion of these new uses places an additional requirement on a person requesting a burn permit. They will now be required to address the 10 items listed in the open burning statute. This also means that the Chief (or the member who shares this responsibility) will likely see many more burn plans than previously. If you are unfamiliar with burn plans, see the August 2010 issue of *The Rural Firefighter* for more information.

The statute takes effect August 27, 2011.



Smokey Bear School Visits

Smokey Bear is the most widely recognized symbol of fire prevention in the world today. His message is widely accepted and understood by young and old alike. A visit to the schools in your fire district by Smokey can be a valuable effort. A few minutes of preparation make the presentation much more convincing and effective.

Smokey’s Rescue

The following facts are useful in answering questions or telling Smokey Bear’s story. The black bear cub which came to be known as “Smokey” was born in 1950. He was born in the Capitan Mountains in Lincoln National Forest, New Mexico. The 17,000-acre Capitan Fire destroyed the forest. The burned cub was found clinging to the charred remains of a tree. His mother had apparently perished. A veterinarian treated the cub’s burns and nursed him back to health. The cub was named Smokey and grew rapidly. While still a cub, it was decided that Smokey would become the living symbol of wildfire prevention in the United States. A special flight was arranged to fly Smokey to Washington, D.C., where he would reside in the National Zoo. Smokey’s service as a living symbol was phenomenal. Three million people visited him each year.

Answers to Commonly Asked Questions

Where is your shovel? At the fire station.

Are you a man? Smokey is a bear, isn't he!
Can you remove your hat? No, he would be out of uniform.

What do you do with your shovel? Shovels can be used to put out fires.

Do you fight forest fires? Yes, but most of his time is spent telling people how to prevent wildfires.

What is your name? His name is "Smokey."
Is it hot in there? Bears have lots of fur that keeps them warm.

Some questions or statements will put you on the spot. If you encounter one, it is often best simply to ignore it. Children seem to accept the idea that Smokey doesn't always hear them. It will be especially effective if you avoid a long pause after their comment. If you don't have an answer, have something else to say. Immediately change the subject or ask a question.



Important Messages for Children

Smokey's friends never play with matches. It works well to say this to a class, then ask them to repeat it with you.

Never leave a campfire burning and unattended. Ask the children to remind their parents to drown a campfire with water, smother it with dirt, then stir the ashes until they are cool.

Always get a burn permit. Ask children to remind their parents to have a burn permit before doing any open burning. They must get a permit from the fire chief.

Young children should never try to help Smokey by trying to put out a fire. Make certain the children know they should tell an adult about any fires they see.

How would you report a fire if you see one? Tell children how it is done in your community. Teach them the following:

- Tell an adult, or if this isn't possible,
- Who to call.
- How to call.
- What information to give.
- The number is for emergency use only.

12 Reminders

- Try not to let the children see you carry the costume in or out of the school.
- Never admit to the children (or in the presence of children) that you were Smokey Bear.
- Never allow anyone to see you partially dressed in the Bear costume.
- Dress in a private area, where the children can't see you.
- It gets hot in the costume, remove shirt, tie and glasses.
- Scratching your face is impossible!
- Work boots or work shoes should be worn. If dress/sports shoes are worn, put the fur boots over them.
- Don't talk—let your helper do this.
- Do not drink alcohol before or during the wearing of the Smokey Bear suit.
- Always try to remain in character.
- Read information about Smokey Bear. Children love to ask questions.
- If the costume is damp after you use it, air dry it before packing it away. This will prevent mildew and make it more pleasant for the next person who wears it.

Hints to Make a School Visit Easier

- * When Smokey visits a school, he will need a helper. A fellow firefighter is best, but someone from the school is fine.
- * Enter the school as inconspicuously as possible (hard with a big costume case!).
- * Put the costume on where the children will not see you. Let your helper know you might need help getting in and out of the costume. Once in the costume, you will have limited vision and may want help walking in an unfamiliar building.
- * It is easiest if Smokey enters the room after the children are seated. If they are restless, have Smokey raise a paw while the helper asks them to be quiet, you will be surprised how much the children respect Smokey's wishes.
- * Plan for a brief visit, as the costume gets hot, usually 10-20 minutes. Smokey is most effective in grades K-2.
- * As soon as you finish, say goodbye and exit the room. Wait until you get back to the private room to remove the costume.
- * Avoid situations where you will be inactive, like standing while students file in or out of a room. It gets hot and gives the students time to scrutinize the costume to figure out if there is really a person in there. By the same token, try not to get

so close they can touch the costume and realize you aren't a bear.

Visiting children as Smokey Bear can be a very rewarding experience. Students have a real love for Smokey and believe everything he tells them. You can definitely have an impact on their safety behavior.

Robert E. Vogltance
Prevention-Public Fire Education



Flood Response Operations

Water, water, water everywhere. It seems if we aren't burning, we're swimming. For those with 6X6's, there will be an unending urge to go "swimming" with your truck. That's what the Army does with them, isn't it? Chiefs, please think before that call comes in to "check things out." Evacuations are one thing but "checking" is another. Everyone knows that to dry brakes after rolling through a puddle, you hold your foot on the brake pedal for a few extra feet to heat the brakes up. What if that puddle is over 30 inches deep? With the proper Deep Water Forging Kit and some special training, this isn't a problem, but with all of the extra time to outfit the trucks, train and perform extra maintenance afterward, it can deflate the fun balloon real quick. The kit must be removed, wheels pulled, bearings cleaned and repacked, differentials drained, flushed and refilled, and if the proper procedure was not followed, you may have to replace



the clutch assembly. It's a lot of work with not much return. Evacuations save lives, but "checking it out" just causes a lot of extra work. The Fire Shop has a few 6x6's ready to deploy if needed for evacuations. You can contact me as needed in an emergency, day or night, on my cell 402.499.2650.

Lew Sieber
Equipment Manager

Sandy's Corner



It was great getting to see so many of you at Fire School. I always enjoy working the Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) table in Grand Island where I get to promote the NFS and the many programs we provide for fire departments. It also gives me the opportunity to meet and visit with so many of you face-to-face that previously I've only visited with by phone. You are a great group of people and I am fortunate to work with all of you.

I wanted to say thank you to everyone who responded so quickly to the agreements/memorandum of understanding forms that were sent to fire departments needing to renew their contracts. Years ago it was like pulling teeth to get these returned and it's not so bad anymore. Either I've mellowed or you all have gotten a lot better at responding to my requests. There are still a few that have not returned their contract/MOU and I'm going to begin calling departments. Sometimes that personal touch makes a difference. ☺

Regarding the renewal contracts, please remember that the person who signs for the district is the "president of the rural board." No one else – not the chief, former president, or the secretary/treasurer should be signing off on these agreements. I do my best to monitor signatures and

make sure they match, but just wanted to remind you about this.

We continue to add to our list of departments reporting online. It seems a few are added each week, and I've begun calling departments to encourage them to report online. Change is difficult—I know that as well as anyone—but this change is a good one, not only for us, but for you. If the fire chief or someone in the department has an email address, please consider reporting online. We would really appreciate it.

Mutual Aid – if you had a wildfire and requested aid from bordering counties, PLEASE report those fires. I currently have over 140 I'm trying to match up, so please help me out!

Keep up the good work!



VFA Grants Status

As of this writing, funding for the 2011 Nebraska Volunteer Fire Assistance Grants is yet to be received. Until we receive official word that the funding has been awarded, we are unfortunately in a holding pattern. We know this puts many of you in a difficult position and we're doing everything we can to speed the process along. Award letters will be sent out as soon as we receive notification about the funding. As of right now, the due date for completing

approved projects is still September 30, 2011. For the fire departments who receive award letters, if you have problems meeting that deadline or if you are no longer able to utilize the funding, please contact Don Westover, Fire Program Leader, as early as you can at 402.472.6629 or dwestover1@unl.edu. "Leftover" or returned grants are awarded to additional fire departments who applied but may not have received funding in the first round.



Calendar of Events

- Sept. 10 Nebraska Fallen Firefighters Memorial Service, Kearney
- Sept. 18 Wildfire Tactical Decision Games, Mutual Aid Fire School, Wauneta
- Sept. 26-29 Fire & Arson Investigation Conference, Kearney
- Oct. 20-22 NSVFA Annual Conference, Fremont
- Oct. 24-28 S-390 Intro to Fire Behavior Calculations Course, Kearney (date/location tentative)



www.facebook.com/nebraskaforestservice
www.facebook.com/nebraskawildlandfireacademy

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln is an equal opportunity educator and employer.

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

