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The Rural Firefighter

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Four Common Denominators

Fire seasons are often judged by the number of fires and acres burned. Currently, fire reports show 596 fires burned just 29,544 acres (numbers won't be finalized till after the first of the year). Appearances can be deceiving however. Nebraska experienced what possibly will be the most serious prescribed fire incident ever, the loss of three civilian lives. In another area, two firefighters were caught in a burnover, but have thankfully recovered. And as of the writing of this newsletter, the ground could still be smoking from a late-season fire in the Stapleton area that blackened over 20,000 acres and destroyed one home.

Thankfully, the fire service was spared anything more serious. But without a doubt, fire behavior distinctions between fatality and serious injury are so minute that many of us may not see it in time. With that in mind, take a look at the four common denominators found on nearly all tragedy and near-miss fires.

1. On relatively small fires or deceptively quiet areas of large fires. Say it with me: There is NO SUCH THING as "just a grass fire!" Fire behavior in fine fuels can change in the blink of an eye. Never let your guard down and constantly update your situational awareness, escape routes and safety zones.

2. In relatively light fuels, such as grass, herbs and light brush. Despite our best efforts here at Nebraska Forest Service, the state has just 1.2 million forested acres. If you count the additional 2 million acres of "nonforestland with trees," that means the remaining 95 percent of Nebraska is covered with what? Light fuels! Fire spread in grasses and brush, also called 1-hour fuels, is often underestimated. Hope for the best but expect (and prepare for) the worst.

3. With unexpected shifts in wind direction or wind speed. A major shift in wind direction and/or speed should rarely be unexpected, but minor or temporary shifts do happen. Fires can generate their own weather and topographic conditions can cause winds to vary. Stay on top of fire weather forecasts and request spot weather forecasts to be as prepared as possible.

4. When fire responds to topographic conditions and runs uphill. Right away, notice no reference to the extent of these conditions, only that they exist. In spite of the impression Interstate 80 provides to travelers, we all know Nebraska is anything but flat. Fire will run as fast (maybe faster?) up a slope in Nebraska as it will in the mountains. Combined with our fine fuels, you have a dangerous mix, especially if you happen to be on that particular hill.

So what's the moral of the story? That's easy! **Fight fire from the black, every time, all the time.** Minimize time in unburned fuel and ALWAYS have escape routes and safety zones identified. If the risk to firefighter safety isn't justified by the reward, let it burn. Trees and grass will grow back. Firefighters can't be replaced.

The Nebraska Forest Service: Improving lives by protecting, enhancing and utilizing Nebraska's tree and forest Resources

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Tips from Tex

This article had previously appeared in the Nebraska Firefighter newspaper. Since many of you do not receive this paper, I elected to submit it for this quarter's Rural Firefighter.

Training Standards

I recently wrote an article about training requirements that appeared in *The Rural Firefighter*. Several things occurred with the publication of the article: 1) - it appeared on the front cover (a first for me), 2) - several folks inquired about getting the task book (at least we know people are reading it), and 3) - due to the length of the article, I need to provide clarification on what I wrote.

The task book is based on NFPA 1001, Standard for Fire Fighter Professional Qualifications, otherwise known as Firefighter I (FF I). The task book is a tool for a fire department to help put together a training program. It would also assist in developing a program for rookie firefighters. So here is where the clarification comes in.

My intent is NOT to suggest the development of a "Nebraska" standard, but to capitalize on the national standard that already exists (NFPA 1001). Why would we want to develop our own standard when there is one in place? The national standard and certification system is recognized across the U.S. This means that if you obtain your FF I certification in Nebraska, you can go anywhere in the U.S. to work for a fire department or join another volunteer department and your training and certification will be accepted. The task book should be used as a guide or plan that can be used locally in your fire department. By NO means is it a replacement for FF I training and certification available through the State Fire Marshal (SFM) training division.

The standard we should all strive for is that of NFPA 1001 (FF I) and nothing less. I would encourage you to contact the SFM training division and schedule a FF I program. The training will be beneficial to both young and old as the training and standards are updated accordingly with the technology and tactics advancement occurring throughout the fire service.

If you have not seen my original article, ask your chief to share *The Rural Firefighter* newsletter with you. We send a copy of the newsletter to the fire chief's address that we have on file. If for some reason your fire chief did not receive the newsletter, you can go to the Nebraska Forest Service website at www.nfs.unl.edu. Under programs, click on the Wildland Fire Program and scroll down to the newsletter section. It's listed at the top as the August 2011 *Rural Firefighter*. Also, if you're not getting the newsletter, have your fire chief contact Sandy (402.472.6623) and update your contact information.

If you're interested in a copy of the task book, it's available on our website under publications and the Wildland Fire Program area.

Until next time, stay safe.

George J. (Tex) Teixeira II

Apparatus Spotlight - This beauty was recently put into service by Keystone-Lemoyne Fire Department. The M1083 5-ton 6x6 is known for reliability and low running costs. KL 41 is currently the only one of its kind in the state. According to the guys at the shop, these may start to trickle in, but how many and how soon are unsure. Call the shop for more details. By the way, nice job KLFD!

Make a Difference

Life is a book of memories. Some good. Some sad and painful. We need to review what has transpired during our previous years in the fire service. Many pages contain good memories. Visiting schools. Children coming to the fire station for a tour. The arrival of new apparatus. Alerting someone of a fire hazerd, thus preventing a possible fire.

New memories are created while attending Fire School, the Nebraska Wildland Fire Academy or various trainings/conferences/workshops to learn new techniques and network with firefighters from different areas. Oh yes! Remember the annual banquet and award nights to receive recognition for years of service and/or special accomplishment in the community.

But what about the many pages of sad memories? We all have some. Answering a fire call in the middle of the night only to watch someone's home and possessions disappear. Spending hours fighting a losing battle with a fire in a business district knowing it may never be rebuilt, resulting in a major loss to your community and tax base. Witnessing the tears of someone who has just lost everything to fire. And the worst possible scenario, the loss of life in a fire and having to remove the body. In a small community, this could be a neighbor, a friend or a relative. Following this are the hurt, pain, tears and suffering of the family **and** the firefighters. Some memories will haunt forever.

Then come the "why's?" Why did this person or persons have to die? Why didn't we get to the fire faster? Why weren't we better prepared? Why didn't we do something to prevent this from happening?

I believe every firefighter has experienced loss during their tenure in the fire service. But how many of you have taken the time to review the whys? The dictionary defines "why" as the reason, cause, motive or purpose. How many of you have given serious thought about the number of fires and fire deaths that could have been prevented? Many of you are saying . . . here comes Ro-Bear's fire prevention lecture again. And you are right!

Why do we spend so much time and money (trucks, equipment, building, training, etc.) preparing for fires? Why do we conduct fire drills teaching people how to exit a burning building? Why do we promote installing smoke/fire alarms? Why do we teach stop, drop and roll to children? You are right, we have to be prepared.

But think about this! In essence, you are saying "Let the fire happen and we'll see what we can do to save a building, a field of grain, a life, etc." This is a **reactive response. A proactive response is to prevent fires before they happen!** Your job as a firefighter is to save lives and protect property. You agreed to do this when you joined the fire department. What is so frightening about the words **fire prevention**? It is definitely a more cost effective way to combat fires in your community.

How many times have you said this? "Why should I get involved in fire prevention? No one else wants to. The main thing the fire department wants to do is fight fires. The rural board and city council don't want to spend more money, so why should I worry about it?" You and I both know we can't think like this. Take a positive approach to fire prevention. Even if others are not doing anything, that does not mean you can stand by and do nothing. Remember when you joined the fire department? Your objective was to save lives and protect property. You are not doing your job if you are waiting for the siren to sound before you make a move. You may be too late! It could be your family, your friends or your neighbors.

New look . . . same great source of fire prevention tips and tricks. Look for it in a mailbox near you!

You have a responsibility to yourself and your community. If you believe in what you are doing, you can't ignore fire prevention! It is up to YOU to take the message to your community. Take a positive approach. Be proactive! Instead of thinking of reasons not to do fire prevention, take the time to list the reasons why you *should* be involved. At the top of the list are your family, your friends, your neighbors, your relatives and your community—an important list! Think about the effect your involvement in prevention will have on others. You can reduce the number of fires and fire losses. YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Are YOU getting the message now? Do you see the key to success in fire prevention activities in your community? That's right! YOU! Make YOUR remaining years in the fire service full of good memories.

Bob Vogltance

Fire Shop Notes

As I sit in the airport waiting for my next flight, I wanted to jot down a few notes to pass along to fire chiefs and safety officers in Nebraska. The bi-annual inventory process has begun and in the following months, I will be visiting every department with equipment on loan through the NFS equipment program.

I need to bring attention to a startling issue that has come up again. With just one week on the road, I came across trucks in three stations ready for the next fire, but parked in gear. Please, please, don't do this!!

I know one of the arguments: "It helps us get out the door faster!" But I urge everyone to reconsider. Does it really help you get going that much faster? You still have to let the air build up, and what about the oil pressure? Did you know that on multifuel engines, it can take as much as a minute and a half to build good oil pressure? By revving it up from a cold start, you are starving the engine for oil.

To further the point, we had a call this week for a grill, radiator, and possibly a hood. It seems that a firefighter started the truck to build air and oil pressure while he got dressed. He reached in, hit the start button and, since the truck had been left in gear, it backed into the truck behind it. How many times has that been done and afterward, we couldn't remember if we checked the gear shift? You should also be aware that most of these trucks do not even need the switch on to run. So please consider addressing this in your local SOP.

Did you know . . .

On multifuel engines, it can take as much as a minute and a half to build good oil pressure.

Until the next time, take care of the truck and it will be there to take care of you. As always, if you have any questions or need clarification just call me at the shop 402.624.8061 or on my cell at 402.499.2650.

Keep it simple

Lew

Sandy's Corner

Isn't this weather GREAT! I do love living where there is four seasons, but it seems some seasons last longer than others. What we are having now could last another 6 months and I would be happy!

Just a few reminders…

Please, please do not use tape when you return the yellow cards. Duct tape is really good stuff, but it is almost impossible to separate the pages without tearing them. The yellow cards will go through the post office without tape or staples – just fold them over and put them in the mailbox.

Special thanks and a "Gold Star" to each Rural Board president who has responded to our requests to update their department's Agreement/Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). As you know, these renewals are done every five years and obtaining signatures can be a major challenge. I'm proud to report that as of today, out of 487 Rural Fire Districts, we are 100% on MOU renewals and only four departments short of agreement renewals. These are the highest percentages of signed renewals we have ever had on file, and it could not have been achieved without the cooperation of the president of the Rural Board and the help of the department's fire chief. Thank you, thank you! As of January, we begin again with those whose contracts expire in 2012, so for many of you, be watching for those renewal forms after the 1st of the year.

We have entered a new age where fewer and fewer people have landline phones and cell phones are becoming the norm. I'm finding this out when I attempt to call the phone numbers we have on file for your departments only to find out they don't exist anymore. If you are a fire chief and/or president/secretary-treasurer of the rural board and you no longer have a landline phone, please let me know your cell phone number. These numbers are confidential and not given out to anyone.

At least once a week, I receive a call from a department who cannot get on our website to report fires because their password doesn't work. The most common problem is the password is being entered in either all caps or all lower case. Our system is "case sensitive" and the password has to begin with a capital letter and the rest lowercase. I know there are other times when other problems do arise, so please don't hesitate to call for assistance if needed (402.472.6623).

This is the last issue of *The Rural Firefighter* for 2011, so this is my only time to wish you a Happy Thanksgiving and Merry Christmas. Enjoy your time with family and friends and be safe! It has been my pleasure to have worked with all of you in 2011!

Calendar of Events

Nov 5-6	Advanced Wildland Firefighter courses, Shelton Fire Dept.
Nov 6	Daylight Savings ends
Jan 4	Basic red card class starts (11 weeks), hosted by SCC-Lincoln
Feb 10-12	Les Lukert Winter Conference, Kearney
April 14-22	NWFA

Attention Readers!

The 2011 edition of *Selected Laws Pertaining to Nebraska Firefighters & Fire Departments*, also known as the Blue Book, is currently available on the Nebraska Forest Service website, nfs.unl.edu.

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year from all of us at NFS!

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