

THE RURAL FIREFIGHTER

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Nebraska Forest Service

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Us Versus Us? or 'Concensus: A Dirty Word?'

"Those guys don't train as much as we do, so we just won't call them for mutual aid (even though they're closer)."

"The chief of that department (who has been retired for years) did something (that nobody remembers) to offend the former chief of our department so we don't like them."

"That guy disagreed with me, so I'm going to get 'my guys' to work against him."

Sound familiar? The "Us vs. Them" attitude is an unfortunate fire service "tradition" that impacts important relationships. Instead of moving an organization forward, it clouds the big picture and keeps everyone focused on minor, insignificant things.

At any level, this attitude is destructive (and evidently contagious). So if you've found yourself being pulled toward this, here's a secret. Come in close. Are you ready?

THERE IS NO THEM!

They do not exist. There is only us, the members of a particular group. Everyone has a role during a mutual aid call, a training event, planning the purchase of a new truck, trying to get a bill through the legislature or anything else. If it's fire service related, we all have an interest and something to offer. It may not be true everywhere, but in the

current fire service, its getting harder to find people still willing to volunteer, and the days of a department having everything needed (personnel, equipment, etc.) could very well be gone. Not utilizing everyone available may come at your expense, or worse, at the expense of those you protect.

Getting a group to agree on something can be a challenge—and that's ok! As President Reagan said, "If my advisors always agree with me, somebody isn't doing their job!" So go into the discussion expecting people to disagree with you. It forces you to do your homework and be

prepared to state your case. Just remember, even though you disagree with somebody, you still need to work with them. The key word is concensus. That means no one gets everything they want, rather you'll find a "group opinion" or "general agreement" that everyone can live with.

So next time, try these alternatives:

"Those guys don't train like we do, but maybe we can schedule something with them because we'll need their help someday."

"Why don't we like that department again?"

"I don't know why that guy disagreed with me, but instead of listening to rumors, I think I'll ask him directly."



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Tips From Tex

Twice a year I can guarantee a phone call from a friend who wants to talk about anything and everything fire related. Of course, this is not a short conversation and he usually calls me at home and on the weekend. During this recent conversation he had some very good ideas and thoughts about the state of the volunteer fire service and how it can be improved. But I found his thoughts regarding the mutual aid directory most interesting and I will try to convey his thoughts in this article.

During times of major disasters in your community, i.e., flooding, fires, tornados, etc., who does the town, village or city mayor turn to for that initial take-charge person? If you hold the title of fire chief, it's you! Yes, you! Not the county or state emergency manager or anyone else who works for the community. The fire department is the first to be called in the event of any emergency because you are the one who has the knowledge, experience and know who to contact for additional assistance.

But where are we going to get all this additional knowledge and experience? Well, this would come from education, training, responding to calls as each is unique in of its self, attending mutual aid meetings, etc. But where does all this contact information come from? An updated mutual aid directory can be a major asset to you.

I know some people would answer the above question by saying they would have the dispatch center make the phone calls, and yes, they can assist if they are not part of the "emergency." But what tool do they have that would assist them in making those contacts for you? Would the dispatch center know the home number of Bob who owns the local lumber yard, so you can get some shoring material, or John who owns the local excavating business because you need a backhoe, or the after-duty contact for the Co-op because you

need fuel? With an updated mutual aid directory, they could.

The mutual aid directory is a tool that can assist you in the event of a major or even minor incident where you need additional equipment, specialized equipment, specialty teams or anything else that you do not have in your department. A mutual aid directory is



for you and your use. It can be made to suit you and contain anything you feel is necessary to assist you. We are all using equipment today that we feel is making our lives simpler—smartphones, iPhones, iPads, iPods, etc. But until I'm smart enough to make an app for these items, the old-fashioned mutual aid directory is what we have.

If you are in need of an updated mutual aid directory, give me a call or send an email, and I can get you started.

Until next time, stay safe.
George J. (Tex) Teixeira II



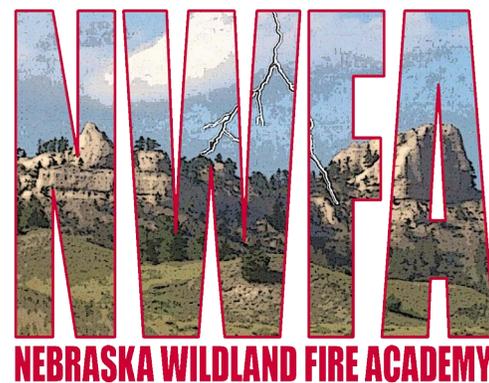
Calendar of Events

- Feb. 10-12 Les Lukert Winter Conference, Kearney
- March 25 Otoe County Mutual Aid Training Day, Syracuse
- April 14-22 Nebraska Wildland Fire Academy, Fort Robinson SP
- May 18-20 Nebraska State Fire School, Grand Island

5th Annual NFWA

The Nebraska Wildland Fire Academy (NFWA) will take place April 14 - 22, 2012, at Fort Robinson State Park near Crawford. NFWA is an interagency effort supported by many local, state and federal partners. Courses are just \$30 each. Lodging and meals are available for as low as \$35/day. Many courses are presented on weekends to accommodate volunteer schedules.

Online registration and payment are available in addition to traditional mail-in registration. Check the Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) and NFWA Facebook pages for more information. We encourage early registration as class sizes are limited and courses with low student numbers may be cancelled. Classes are typically 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. daily. This year's courses are below. Details are available on the NFS website.



- RT-130 Annual Fireline Refresher
- S-130/S-190/L-180 Basic Firefighting
- S-131 Advanced Firefighter Training
- S-133 Look Up/Down/Around
- S-200 Initial Attack IC
- S-212 Wildland Fire Chain Saws
- S-230 Single Resource Boss
- S-231 Engine Boss
- S-234 Ignition Operations
- S-290 Intermediate Fire Behavior
- S-300 Extended Attack IC
- S-330 Task Force/Strike Team Leader Leadership in Wildfire Prevention Incident Management Workshop

Volunteer Fire Assistance grant program

Applications for the Volunteer Fire Assistance grant program were included with this issue of the Rural Firefighter newsletter. If you did not receive one, please contact Sandy at 402.472.6623.

Welcome to Fire Prevention 2012!

Another year is behind us, now is the time to step forward and put what you know about preventing fires to work in your communities.

Each new year is a time for rededication. A good place to start is reviewing the past year. Look back at what you have (or have not) done to spread the fire prevention message in your communities. Can you speak with pride about your fire prevention efforts during 2011? Have you reduced the number of fires in your community/fire district? If not, now is the time to make a change and do what you agreed to do when you joined the fire department. **SAVE LIVES AND PROTECT PROPERTY.** To do this successfully, you need to become pro-active and prevent fires before they start.

Once the fire alarm sounds, you have already suffered a LOSS. It may be smoke damage, fire burning a building or a field of standing grain. It could even be the loss of a life . . . that loss of life may even be a firefighter. Don't forget to count the loss of time being

away from your job, the cost of fuel, the wear and tear on the vehicles. Fires are expensive for you and your community.

You have a responsibility to the people in your community. If you truly believe in what it means to be a firefighter, you cannot ignore fire prevention. It is up to you to become pro-active and deliver a positive prevention message to everyone in your fire district.



You say you don't have time! Then let me ask you. Where did you find the time to join the fire department? Where do you find the time to go to fire meetings? Where do you find the

time to attend fire drills, mutual aid meetings, local training seminars, state fire school and/or the annual state fire conference? Moreover, where do you find the time to respond to fires at all times of the day and night?

The way I see it, you do not have a legitimate excuse. Instead of thinking of excuses why you cannot participate in fire prevention, take the time to list all the reasons why you should be involved. For starters, YOUR FAMILY, YOUR FRIENDS, YOUR RELATIVES, YOUR NEIGHBORS, YOUR COMMUNITY AND LAST, BUT NOT FORGOTTEN, IS YOUR FELLOW FIREFIGHTERS. Many firefighters die fighting fire due to someone's carelessness.

Oh, I know, some will read this and say "I have heard all this before," but have you listened and gotten involved in spreading the fire prevention message? Some have. They have reduced either the number of fires in their communities or their dollar losses. Or both! I am not going away; I will keep repeating the fire prevention message until you realize how important it is. Remember, fires happen 365 days a year, 24/7. Fire prevention is a year-around job.

If the fire alarm sounds . . . you haven't done your fire prevention.

If a smoke alarm activates or sounds . . . you haven't done your fire prevention.

If a child has to perform stop, drop and roll . . . you haven't done your fire prevention.

If overloaded electric circuits in a home start a fire . . . you haven't done your fire prevention.

If a space heater placed close to flammable materials starts a fire . . . you haven't done your fire prevention.

If someone burning on a windy day starts a wildland fire . . . you haven't done your fire prevention.

If smoking in bed causes a house fire . . . you haven't done your fire prevention.

If children playing with matches starts a fire . . . you haven't done your fire prevention.

If someone burning trash without an approved burn barrel cover starts a fire . . . you haven't done your fire prevention.

If an unattended meal cooking on the stove starts a fire . . . you haven't done your fire prevention.

If failure to warn people of extreme dry weather conditions causes a wildfire . . . you haven't done your fire prevention.

If someone has to leave their home because of a fire . . . you haven't done your fire prevention.

If your community loses a business because of a fire . . . you haven't done your fire prevention.

If someone gets burned or loses their life due to a fire . . . you haven't done your fire prevention.

This could go on forever. The point is, if fires are going to be prevented, YOU have to do YOUR FIRE PREVENTION.

Bob Vogltance, fire resource manager, Prevention-Public Fire Education

Sandy's Corner

I was very impressed with Casey's article on Us Versus Us on the front cover of this newsletter. Even though he writes it as it relates to fire departments, I believe it applies to all organizations. Building consensus is probably one of the hardest tasks to accomplish as a leader. It is very difficult to accomplish anything when everyone is working against each other and each seems to have a different agenda. If you don't believe this, just look at our Legislature. It is human nature to want your way, but, as Casey said, think about the big picture. Let one of your New Year's resolutions be "I will be a consensus builder in 2012!"

Thank you to those chiefs who responded to my requests to report wildland fires so mutual aid calls could be matched with home departments. There were an additional 50 fires I was able to match, but that still left 345 unmatchable. Of the 964 fires being reported to the Feds, that is still quite a large number! The really sad part is some of those fires were LARGE fires that had a large number of responses from neighboring departments. I really hope we can do better in 2012.

Spring Fire Potential Up

Here's the word on the spring fire season from Allen Dutcher, state climatologist at the Nebraska State Climate Office.

The lack of significant fall precipitation and winter snowfall has resulted in elevated fire danger. Although not unheard of during the winter months, high fire dangers are not typical for the Plains region. Usually enough snowfall has fallen through midwinter to either cover dead vegetation from the previous growing vegetation and/or the temperatures are cold enough to limit fire dangers to the mid-day hours when temperatures are at their maximum and relative humidity levels are at their minimum. Maximum temperatures have consistently exceeded

50 F. here in Nebraska, with occasional bouts of 60 F. plus temperatures. To reach these types of temperatures, there is usually a lack of significant moisture in the lower atmosphere allowing relative humidity levels to drop below 20 percent. The perfect ingredient for high fire indices. Throw in a brisk breeze and conditions have been perfect for rapid fire spread.

Until a sustained blanket of snow covers vegetation across the central and northern Plains, fire danger will remain elevated anytime temperatures rises into the 50s. It's just not the sustained snow cover that is needed to reduce the fire danger. When the snow melts, there needs to be enough moisture in the snow to saturate that thatch layer between the standing vegetation and

the soil surface. This would help moisten the upper couple of inches of the soil surface and provide surface moisture necessary to keep the thatch layer damp when/if temperatures return to the 50s or higher. As we begin our annual temperature cycle rise from January into the dead of summer, we are also going to need ample spring moisture to promote rapid vegetation green-up this spring. A failure of timely and generous spring rainfall would likely result in high fire danger indices through much of this spring.

The reason the fire danger has the potential to stick around through this spring is the complete lack of significant moisture for most of central and northern Plains since this fall. Storm systems have consistently tracked north and south of Nebraska the past 4 months, leading to the onset of drought conditions for portions of eastern Nebraska. Unfortunately, the latest climate outlooks issued by the Climate Prediction Center indicate an above normal chance for below normal moisture for the southern half of Nebraska during February-April and March-May. This suggests that the rains necessary to end/reduce high fire danger indices may be difficult to come by.

Also, the National Interagency Fire Center Predictive Services (www.predictiveservices.nifc.gov/outlooks/outlooks.htm) released an outlook showing they expect drought conditions in eastern Nebraska to "persist or intensify."

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