



VCOS VCOS NEWS

The Official Newsletter of the Volunteer & Combination Officers Section
of the International Association of Fire Chiefs

Summer/Fall 2017

CHAIR'S CORNER

Using All Available Resources!

By Chief Timothy S. Wall, North Farms (Conn.) Volunteer Fire Department

Greetings to everyone; hope your summer is going well and you have been enjoying some pleasant breezes and cool evenings. Unfortunately, I realize that some of you have to deal with extreme heat and dryness every summer which is why we are presenting you with two articles on the wildland fire threat that always rears its head this time of year.

The International Association of Fire Chiefs has a multitude of resources on wildland firefighting and all VCOS members who are in a location subject to this threat should be aware of these online resources (<https://www.iafc.org/topics-and-tools/wildland>). In particular, the IAFC's Ready, Set, Go! (RSG) Program, managed in partnership with the USDA Forest Service, seeks to develop and improve the dialogue between fire departments and the residents they serve and is an invaluable resource. The articles you will find herein focus on fuels mitigation, which is an important aspect of pre-planning and community education.

As usual, your board has been hard at work on your behalf these past several months. We are diligently filling leadership positions from our membership as the need arises, usually in response to a request from the IAFC or external organization

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The West Coast Embraces the New Symposium

By fire service contributor Mike Macdonald

Anyone familiar with the IAFC's Volunteer & Combination Officers Section knows that the organization is dedicated to bettering the fire service and emergency sector through every means possible. One of its most successful endeavors was the creation of an annual symposium, where chief officers from progressive volunteer and combination departments gathered to learn, network, and recharge. For two decades, Symposium in the Sun, held in Florida, has been helping departments across the country enhance their professionalism.

While most leadership topics transcend geography, the fact is that issues faced within the emergency sector occasionally do vary by region, and it's no secret that firefighting west of the Mississippi River comes with some unique challenges. As a result, the VCOS launched a sister event last year, Symposium in the West, designed specifically to present outstanding leadership education and exciting networking opportunities for that vast region.

The second Symposium in the West was recently held in Reno, Nevada, with the theme of "Be the Change," and the underlying goal of educating and inspiring attendees to take the information to which they had been exposed and applying it to their own departments and communities.

"I can't stress enough how great the symposium was," says

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VCOS Board of Directors Election

Congratulations to these chiefs, who were elected to three-year terms on the VCOS Board through FRI 2020.

- Chief Norvin Collins, Sauvie Island (Ore.) Fire District
- Chief James Cook, Leesburg (Va.) Volunteer Fire Company
- Chief Charles (Chuck) Flynn, Suffield (Conn.) Fire Department

Board officers were selected as follows: Chief Timothy S. Wall, Chair; Chief Chuck Flynn, Vice Chair; Chief Norvin Collins, Secretary/Treasurer; Chief Donna Black, International Director

We are Working Toward Wildfire Readiness

By Fire Chief Craig Daugherty, San Juan County (N.M.) Fire Department

San Juan County Fire Department (SJCFFD) has made huge strides in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) arena when it comes to community wildfire readiness department planning and operations. A combination department consisting of eight paid chief officer staff and over 260 paid/call volunteer firefighters covering a response area of over 4,000 square miles, we have made significant efforts in implementing programs and partnerships that help us engage and guide our community to face the challenges that come with protecting and living in an environment at risk of wildfire events.

One of SJCFFD's most notable fires was the 4901 (Blanco) Fire which burned a total of 352 acres between June 18 and June 26, 2012. Although not a large fire by western standards, it was a challenge as it burned through residential areas. A total of five homes, twelve outbuildings, numerous cars, boats and RVs were lost. Over 120 firefighters fought the fire using more than 30 apparatus from SJCFFD, Bloomfield Fire, Farmington Fire, Durango Fire, Upper Pine Fire, Los Pinos Fire, BLM field offices from Farmington and Taos, US Forest Service and New Mexico State Forestry. Management of the Blanco Fire highlights one of our department's successes: a strong, interagency mutual aid partnership with neighboring and surrounding jurisdictions. This partnership has led to stronger training and the critical ability to bring in large numbers of resources to battle these interface fires.

Another success this fire showcased was the fuels management project we had recently implemented which successfully stopped the forward movement of the fire (see before and after photos above). If this fuels work had not been accomplished, the fire would have been much larger, more

destructive and would have impacted additional residential areas.

Like all departments, SJCFFD is faced with multiple challenges that come with planning for and managing wildfire efforts. One of these many challenges is our large response area. This, combined with the fact that most of the firefighters are volunteers and must leave work or personal commitments to respond to incidents, often leads to a delay in arriving on scene. In extreme fire conditions this can allow for increased fire growth before suppression operations can occur. Sound mutual aid agreements, mitigation efforts and training are essential in offsetting this type of hurdle frequently faced by volunteer and combination departments.

All new volunteers for SJCFFD go through a semester-long fire academy where they are trained to International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAAC) certifications in Basic EMS, Haz-Mat Operations, Extrication, Firefighter I & II as well as Wildland Firefighter II. This level of training has definitely helped our firefighters prepare for interface wildland fires; they do an amazing job with a wide range of response types on a regular basis due to their training and experiences. Training is ongoing and members of the department take advantage of every opportunity to improve their skills and increase their wildland-fire literacy.

In May 2017, SJCFFD sent two representatives to participate in a national face-to-face event called the Fire Department Exchange (FDX). For three days, Division Chiefs David Vega and Duane Bair met with representatives from nine other departments that have shown success with their community wildfire preparedness. Relatively new among the IAFC's Wildland Fire Programs' offerings, the FDX core focus is to encourage exchange of information among departments to

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Before and After Fuels Mitigation Work. This fuels management project, which had been completed just prior to the Blanco Fire, successfully stopped the forward movement of the fire. If this fuels work had not been accomplished, the fire would have been much larger, more destructive and would have impacted additional residential areas.

VCOS News and Notes

FRI Scholarship Winner

Congratulations to Operations Chief Mike Blackwill from Windsor Severance (Colo.) Fire Rescue and Chief Jonathon Mills from Olympia (N.C.) Volunteer Fire Department for receiving VCOS FRI Scholarships of \$1,500 to attend Fire-Rescue International.

Step Up and Stand Out Nominations

Don't forget to vote for your favorite Step Up and Stand Out Nominee! The grand-prize winner and five finalists will receive valuable prize packages so cast your ballot by September 30. The award is sponsored by Kidde, Allstate, VCOS and several other fire-service partners. Details can be found on the VCOS website (www.vcos.org/StepUpStandOut).

Be Inclusive Poster

Our "Be Inclusive" poster (20x30") was a joint project between the VCOS and the IAFC's Human Relations Committee to bring focus to inclusivity in the fire service. It was rolled out at Fire-Rescue International and is downloadable on the VCOS website, along with a smaller (8.5x11") version. We will make some printed copies available at Symposium in the Sun as well.

Follow Us on Social Media!

We hope you'll like us on Facebook if you haven't already. In addition, follow us on Twitter @IAFC_VCOS. Use social media to stay connected, network with others and see all the latest VCOS news.

www.VCOS.org

Chair's Corner, continued from p. 1

or to staff one of our own initiatives. We look for members who have actively sought more involvement with us in the past but it is still occasionally a challenge to find the right person for the right position. We also strive to find "emerging leaders" with a view toward future succession planning for the board and other leadership roles within the section. Our thanks to everyone who takes a direct role in the furtherance of the goals of our organization.

The VCOS Board of Directors joins me in thanking everyone for participating in the election this year. Not only the 17 members who put their names in the hat for a seat on the board, but everyone who voted! Your interest and enthusiasm continues to make us a thriving organization. We are thrilled and proud to have our own Chief Dan Eggleston move up to serve on the IAFC's Board of Directors as 2nd Vice President and we know that Chief Donna Black will serve us well as our new representative on the IAFC board as our International Director. We also want to specifically thank Chief Randy Larson of Pagosa Springs, Colorado for his 4 years of dedicated service on the VCOS Board.

And finally, I want to call out Chief Luther Fincher of Charlotte, N.C., as he steps down from 23 years of service to the IAFC Board of Directors and 58 years in the fire service! Many of you know that Chief Fincher has been a great friend and mentor to the VCOS; he attended more VCOS Board of Directors meetings than I can remember and always had great input for us. He has attended Symposium in the Sun multiple times and was frequently seen participating in the education and round-table discussions. He has been a great friend, not only to us, but to the fire service as a whole, and he will be missed. God speed, Luther!

Tim

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Congratulations to Training Chief Michael Accardo III of the St. Tammany (La.) Fire District 9 for being selected as the winner of the VCOS-TargetSolutions Training Officer Award. The award was presented at Fire-Rescue International.

Front row from left: Chief Jim Seavey, Chief Chuck Flynn, Chief Timothy Wall. Back row: Chief Norvin Collins, Chief Accardo, Mr. Andy Lynch of TargetSolutions.

Get Checked! Fifteen Minutes that Can Save your Life

Last November, Deputy Chief Jeff Snow was attending his 1st Symposium in the Sun as an IAFC staff member and as a volunteer Deputy Chief from Vienna, Virginia. At some point during a long afternoon of staffing an IAFC booth, one of the vendors insisted they take a break and take advantage of a free medical program called “Get Checked.”

LifeScan is an IAFC and VCOS sponsor and they had a booth at the conference where they were performing free ultrasound scans of the carotid arteries and thyroid. In addition to setting up booths at conferences, the company is available to set up their equipment at fire departments around the country and conduct comprehensive medical exams.

During that simple 5-minute screening, Chief Snow was told there was an anomaly showing on his thyroid scan and that he should get checked by a doctor. Having obtained a “first available” appointment with an endocrinologist in February 2017, he was diagnosed with Hashimoto’s Disease, an auto-immune disease which attacks the thyroid gland; in addition, a node was found on the thyroid. In March, the node was determined to be an aggressive cancer, and in May, Chief Snow underwent a total thyroidectomy. Between February and May, the node had grown dramatically, giving credibility to the conclusion that the simple screening may have saved his life...

In his early 40s and someone who has always focused on keeping fit and healthy, Chief Snow states “I’m eternally grateful to the woman who directed me to get the screening. I knew I had been feeling unusually tired for the past many months, but it never occurred to me that it was anything other than work,



Congratulations to our own Chief Dan Eggleston of Albemarle County Virginia for his election as IAFC 2nd Vice President. He was sworn in at Fire-Rescue International and will move up to serve as President of the IAFC in July 2019. Chief Eggleston will be the 2nd IAFC President coming from the ranks of the VCOS Board of Directors, following Chief John M. Buckman, III in 1999.

fire department responsibilities, and getting older.”

The current scientific consensus is that there is no increased rate of incidence of thyroid cancer among firefighters so this cancer would not have been on the list of potential things for his doctor to watch for. That said, through the good fortune of having had easy access to the scan at Symposium, the cancer was caught early and Chief Snow was able to avoid undergoing any radiation or chemotherapy. According to Chief Snow, “I’m extremely fortunate; the cancer did not spread, and the synthetic thyroid hormone allows me to continue in the fire department.” He urges everyone to take advantage of any medical screening offered; your life may depend on it.

New Symposium, continued from p. 1

Jesus Gonzalez, a lieutenant with the Atascocita Fire Department in Humble, Texas. “The speakers were phenomenal and full of good knowledge to take back to our departments, so we can either build from it or incorporate some of the information straight in.”

The Atascocita Fire Department protects 75,000 residents across 47 square mile, but despite the high population figure, Gonzalez says the department’s biggest challenge is always recruitment and retention, even as the community continues to grow.

“We’d been wanting to attend the symposium in Florida for a while, but the dates never lined up,” he says. “So we were happy to see it come out West. I was 100% satisfied with what was delivered based on what was advertised, and I will definitely be attending again in the future.”

That sentiment was shared by Tim Perciful, the fire and life safety educator and PIO of the Mountain View Fire & Rescue Department, which covers about 70 square unincorporated miles in King County, Washington, just outside of Seattle. Perciful has attended both Symposiums in the West, as well as the Symposium in the Sun last year.

“I enjoy many of the presentations that take place at the

conferences, especially anything to do with recruiting and retention,” Perciful says.

Mountain View is part of the National Volunteer Workforce Solutions, a pilot program initiated by the International Association of Fire Chiefs and the VCOS to assist combination and volunteer fire departments in improving their ability to recruit, retain, and manage the volunteer of the future. Part of the program brought participants to the Symposium to share results.

“I really looked forward to meeting with other pilot program participants and the IAFC team about the grant,” Perciful says. “That was one of the best parts of the pilot program. I can’t thank them enough! They’ve been so helpful and I am thankful for all of their hard work.”

The hard work, the VCOS is quick to point out, is likewise being done every day by every department in the nation. By facilitating these events, it allows those on the front lines to network and share ideas and solutions with those who are going through, or who have already gone through, similar challenges. For years it’s been common knowledge that the VCOS Symposium was the best event in the emergency sector. Now, the organization is making that same leadership training and networking even more accessible.

broaden their knowledge-base, consider alternative measures, create new solutions and improve overall practices and procedures within their wildland fire outreach and mitigation programs.

SJCFD supports and works with the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, the collaborative push among all stakeholders to make meaningful progress towards resilient landscapes, fire adapted communities, and safe and effective wildfire response. Annually, we make available a minimum of two wildland type 3 engines for use in the national response to wildland fires in all jurisdictions. We are also promoting the New Mexico Ready, Set, Go! Program and Firewise and are planning to host a Ready, Set, Go training course this fall.

We are proud of being on the leading edge of wildfire readiness by staying informed, involved, and taking advantage of the many opportunities and resources available to enhance our all-encompassing mitigation efforts.

Fire Chief Craig Daugherty is one of twelve subject matter experts on the IAFC's Wildland Fire Policy Committee (WFPC). The WFPC promotes national wildland efforts to reduce wildfire threats through aggressive prevention, public information and education, mitigation, and preparation and response efforts. For more information: www.iafc.org/wildland.

VCOS Yellow Ribbon Report

As a group, firefighters are endangering our own emotional health! We spend so much time helping others, we forget we also need to focus on ourselves and one another. Yet, not only do we have all the "normal" life stressors, but we also have additional stressors from our public safety role.

The objective of the VCOS Yellow Ribbon Report "Under the Helmet: Performing an Internal Size-Up, A Proactive Approach to Ensuring Mental Wellness" is to increase awareness of the fire and emergency services' emotional and behavioral health problems, and emphasize the importance of changing the culture. The report has multiple resources and action items for ensuring the mental wellness of your members. At the very least, the report should spark conversations in your department.

You must talk about emotional health just like you talk about operational training and readiness. As stated in the report, "It's time we acknowledge and truly understand the ongoing emotional impact on our health and well-being. Our lives depend on it."

The report can be downloaded as a PDF or in e-reader format from the homepage of the VCOS website.

www.VCOS.org

Become a Leader in Wildland Fire Preparedness with Ready, Set, Go!

By Kaitlin Sullivan, IAFC Wildland Program Coordinator

The Ready, Set, Go! (RSG) Program, managed by the International Association of Fire Chiefs and funded in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service, is a free wildland fire preparedness program that seeks to develop and improve the dialogue between the fire service and the residents they serve. The program helps the fire service teach individuals who live in high-risk wildland fire areas and the wildland urban interface how to best prepare themselves, their families and their properties against outdoor fire threats.

Through the trusted voice of the fire service, the program and program resources encourage residents and property owners to be Ready by taking personal responsibility and action for themselves and their property; to be Set with situational awareness and to Go and act early when faced with the threat of wildland fire.

The RSG! Program was designed to be easily adaptable to all types of departments and provides access to free resources that can be customized to reflect your community. The program allows members to track their outreach and mitigation efforts and network with other RSG members through the Achievement Management System.

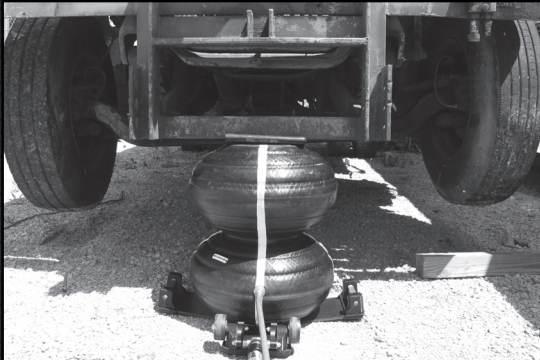
Currently, the program has over 1,700 members including many combination and volunteer fire departments. Here are a few success stories from the program:

Barneget (N.J.) Vol. Fire Department. Barneget is located deep in the New Jersey Pine Barrens, a significant wildland fire threat. The area has had numerous large fires including the 2007 Warren Grove Bombing Range fire that forced eight of Barneget's senior communities to be evacuated along with individual homes down-wind of the fire. The department's wildfire history made them a prime candidate to be one of the 10 RSG Pilot Programs in 2010.

Since the beginning of their RSG! Program affiliation, the department has embraced the RSG tenets and has worked hard to educate their residents about the threat of wildland fire and the importance of mitigation, logging over 2,000 hours of RSG-related work. The department has not only used the RSG! Program to make their community wildfire ready, but they also used the program when Hurricane Sandy hit the Jersey Shore. Barneget reversed their Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) to evacuate residents inland from the shore and credited Ready, Set, Go with building the framework for the emergency response, evacuation and close cooperation between Barneget area police and fire departments. Their embrace of the program has made Barneget Township a national model as a fire-adapted community.

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Brushy Mountain (Okla.) Vol. Fire Department. Brushy Mountain Volunteer Fire Department is a rural department that has become a leader in wildland fire preparedness due to the persistence of one of its members, Firefighter Chris Hoxit.

Firefighter Hoxit joined the RSG! Program with the Brushy Mountain Volunteer Fire Department in 2013. Since then, he has worked diligently to expand the RSG! Program in his community and throughout Oklahoma.

Hoxit has conducted door-to-door outreach to reach more members of his community, outfitted a mitigation trailer for Brushy Mountain Fire and Rescue that has been used to perform home assessments and fuels reduction projects, and arranged for community wildland fire events. He frequently reaches out to the special needs population in his community, including the elderly and the disabled, to assist them in mitigating their property.

Along with spreading RSG in the community, Hoxit and his department have developed working relationships with the Cherokee Nation, the American Red Cross, Brushy Citizen FireCorps, the Office of Emergency Management and numerous area fire departments, both large and small. Together they have established procedures for emergency evacuation shelters, held wildland fire prevention days, conducted home assessments, carried out community defensible space projects, and completed training on wildland fire prevention and suppression.

Kittitas Valley (Wash.) Fire & Rescue. Kittitas Valley Fire & Rescue is a combination department that has used

the Ready, Set, Go! Program to develop a robust resident outreach program and become the trusted source for wildfire preparedness in their community.

The department specializes in door-to-door outreach to residents in fire prone or high-risk areas where they conduct home assessments, fuels mitigation work and hand out Ready, Set, Go materials. The outreach not only allows the department to educate residents, but it allows them to establish pre-fire plans, conduct structure triage, identify water sources for ground and air resources and effectively map the fire prone and high-risk fire areas in their community.

They follow up on each of these fire prone and high-risk areas every three years and have seen some notable improvements in evacuation times and at-risk structures from their outreach. The outreach efforts have prompted residents to mitigate their properties to make structures more fire resistive and safer for firefighter access and turn arounds. They have numerous examples of homeowners who have received RSG materials during home assessments and have used their DIY skills to harden their homes and alter their landscaping. In addition, evacuation times for residents is faster and Kittitas County Sheriff Deputies now have a blue carded procedure to safely and quickly evacuate residents who do not respond to the reverse 911 call.

The Ready, Set, Go! Program will soon be offering grants to departments in high-risk wildland areas to complete actionable, wildland fire mitigation efforts. For more information on all aspects of the program, visit www.wildlandfirersg.org.



CONFERENCE: NOVEMBER 9-12, 2017
CLEARWATER BEACH, FL

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The VCOS Symposium addresses the unique needs of volunteer and combination leaders:

Topics Include:

- VCOS Talks – What You Need to Know
- From the X Box to the Box Alarm
- Leading from Where You Are
- Retention & Recruitment
- To Tweet or Not to Tweet

REGISTER TODAY!

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