



Fighting Western Wildland Fires Arizona Wildfire Academy – Prescott, Arizona

Summary: Wildland fires often pose a significant threat to people, property and the environment in the Western United States. This week's Spotlight focuses on an initiative in Arizona to address the need for trained and certified wildland firefighters.

Arizona experienced more than 3,000 wildfires last year that consumed nearly 700,000 acres. One of these fires grew to become Arizona's biggest wildland fire ever. The "Rodeo-Chediski" burned an area the size of Los Angeles, destroyed more than 400 homes and forced the evacuation of at least 32,000 people. With a continued risk for wildfires, there is a great need for professionally trained firefighters to respond to wildland fires in the western states.

That's why the Arizona State Fire Training Committee launched the Arizona Wildfire Academy (AWA), held for the first time in Prescott, Ariz., in mid-March. The AWA's inaugural training camp was an overwhelming success, according to Arizona fire officials. More than 400 firefighters participated in the training, worked on Task Book and Red Card requirements in classes from the most basic to advanced, and were certified based on National Wildfire Coordinating Group standards. The AWA's first annual wildfire academy was conducted in a fire camp environment and run by a professional wildland firefighter Incident Management Team. Procedures were the same as they would have been for an actual wildland fire event.

Classes covered critical wildland firefighting functions, including Basic Firefighting and Wildland Fire Behavior, Advanced Firefighter Training, Initial Attack Incident Command, Fire Operations in the Urban Interface, Crew Boss/Engine Boss, Incident Business Management, Air Operations, Intermediate Wildland Fire Behavior, Introduction to Fire Behavior Calculations, Basic Incident Command System and Wildland Foam Tactics.

The important thing about the Arizona Wildfire Academy is that it provides a new training resource in an area badly in need of professional, certified wildland firefighters. "There is a tremendous need for continuing wildfire training in the State of Arizona," said Summit Fire District Chief Don Howard. "There are tremendous needs in the southwest, especially when you consider the impact of seven years of drought here," he added.

The AWA is supported by the Bureau of Indian Affairs; the Bureau of Land Management; the U.S. Forest Service; U.S. Park Service; U.S. Fish and Game Service, the Colorado Wildfire Academy, the Texas Wildfire Academy, Utah Wildfire Academy and New York Wildfire Academy as well as the Summit and Central Yavapai Fire Districts, the Prescott Fire Department, the Arizona Division of Emergency Management; the Arizona State Land Department and the Arizona State Fire Marshal's Office.

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