

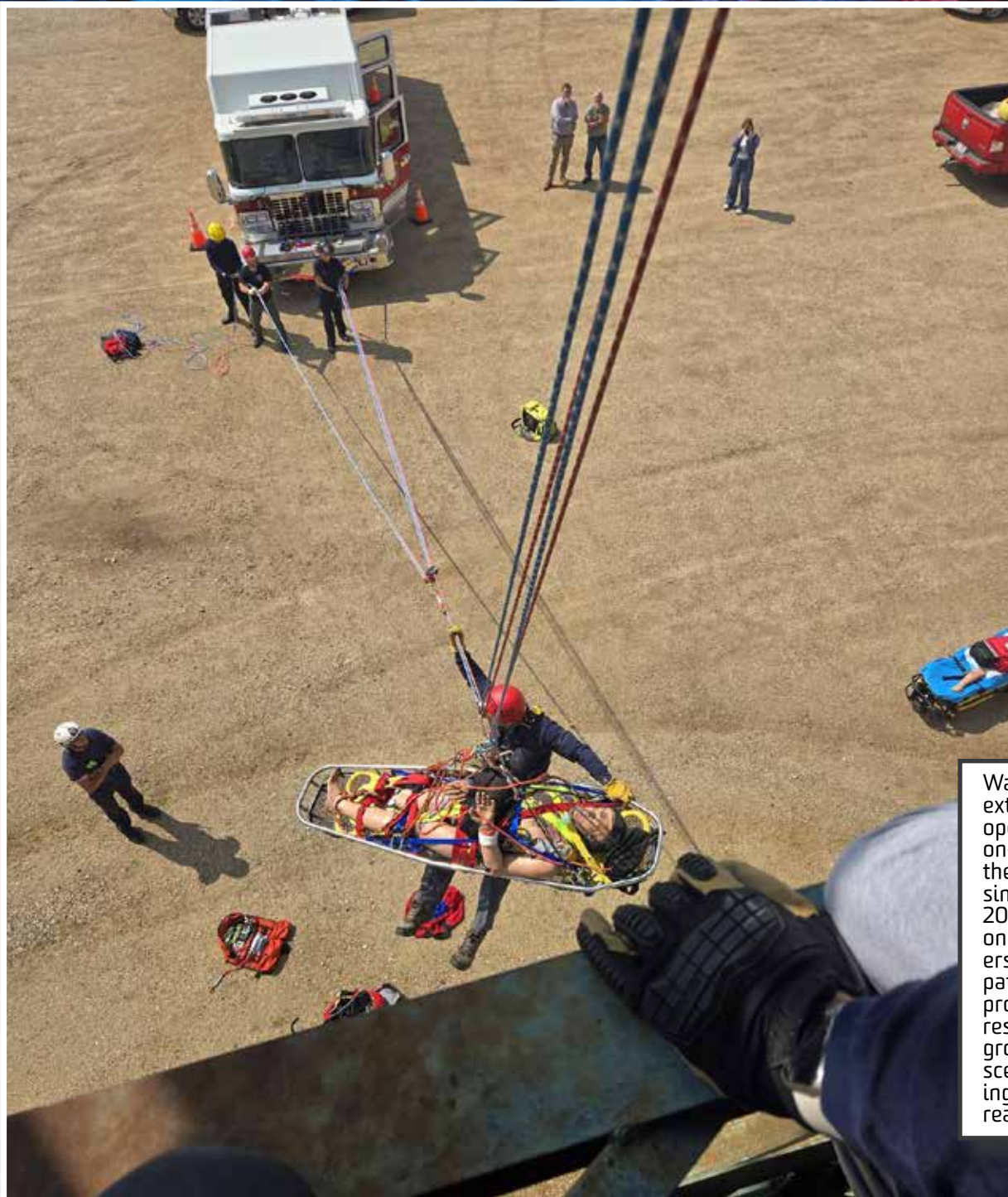
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SEPTEMBER 2025 • VOL. 18 - NO. 7

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Watertown Fire Rescue would like to extend a sincere thank you to Agwrx Co-operative for the opportunity to conduct on-site training at their facility. During the exercise, WFR crews responded to a simulated medical emergency involving a 200-pound mannequin located in a room on top of an elevated 80' tower. Firefighters were required to assess and treat the patient in accordance with department protocols, then perform a high-angle rope rescue to safely bring the patient to the ground for medical transport. Training scenarios like this are invaluable in helping our crews stay sharp and ready for real-life emergencies.



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19-Year-Old Arrested After Stolen Waubay Volunteer Fire Truck Crash

By STEVE JURRENS

A Waubay Fire Volunteer Department fire truck was reported stolen and later recovered, but with significant damage, earlier this week. This incident led to the arrest and charging of Jeremiah Nathaniel Shepherd, 19, of Browns Valley, MN.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Email your Upcoming Event by the 10th of the previous month (ex. Aug. 10 for the September issue) to jeff@southdakotafirefighter.com. There is no charge.

SEPT. 14, 2025: Southeast District Fire School, Yankton.

SEPT. 20, 2025: Badlands District Fire School, Kadoka.

SEPT. 21, 2025: Northwest District Fire School, Isabel.

SEPT. 22-24, 2025: NVFC Fall Conference and Meeting, Rapid City.

OCT. 1-2, 2025: International Association of Arson Investigators South Dakota Chapter's NFA F0756 Fire Investigation: Fire as a Weapon Course, Oct. 1 - 8 a.m. registration, class at 9 a.m., Oct. 2 - class at 9 a.m., 607 20th Ave., Brookings, SD.

OCT. 10-12, 2025: South Dakota Firefighters Association Fall Conference, Spearfish Convention Center, Spearfish.

APR. 24-26, 2026: Rushmore Fire Conference.

JUNE 11-13, 2026: 140th State Fire School, Watertown.

According to court documents, the incident occurred on or about July 21, 2025, in Day County, SD. The Waubay Fire Department reported the theft of the truck on July 20, 2025, at approximately 9:13 a.m., stating it had been taken from Main Street and 3rd Avenue between 1:30 a.m. and 6:30 a.m. on the same day. The truck has been sitting there because of a fundraiser steak dinner for the fire department the night before.

Day County Sheriff's Office deputies responded to the report. Deputy Kolby Weinberg obtained security footage from Jorgenson Meat Processing and Waubay City Hall, which showed the stolen fire truck being driven with its red and blue lights activated. The footage also showed the vehicle parking in a grass lot at 122 Railway Avenue in Waubay, with the driver exiting and entering a nearby house.

Deputies spoke with two individuals who identified the driver as "Jerry" or Jeremiah and later provided the last name Shepherd. Further investigation revealed that Jeremiah Shepherd had been cited by a Roberts County Deputy for underage consumption of alcohol around 6 a.m. on July 20, 2025, approximately two miles from where the stolen fire truck was later found crashed in a ditch.

Deputy Garret Thompson interviewed Shepherd on July 21, 2025. During the interview, Shepherd reportedly stated, "I don't know why I got in that firetruck," and claimed he was "too drunk to remember" the incident.

The fire truck was recovered with "substantial body damage, including wiring ripped out, and

the top light bar being damaged".

Jeremiah Nathaniel Shepherd was formally charged on July 22, 2025, with Grand Theft and Intentional Damage to Property. Both charges are Class 4 Felonies, with the value of the property and damage ranging between \$5,000 and \$100,000.

On July 22, 2025, Judge Marshall C. Lovrien set Shepherd's bond at \$2,500 cash only. Conditions of the bond include no violations of law, random urine analysis/preliminary breath tests, waiver of extradition, and attending all court dates while maintaining contact with his attorney. Christopher Dohrer has been appointed as Shepherd's attorney.

A preliminary hearing in the case is scheduled for Aug. 20, 2025, at 11 a.m.



Single-Engine Plane Crash in Rural New Underwood Results in One Fatality, One Seriously Injured

At approximately 6 a.m. on July 28, 2025 the New Underwood Volunteer Fire Department was dispatched to the scene of a single-engine aircraft crash in the 22800 block of 159th Avenue, Rural New Underwood, South Dakota, Unincorporated Pennington County.

Upon arrival, firefighters and first responders located two individuals on board the downed aircraft and immediately performed extrication and emergency medical procedures.

One individual was pronounced deceased at the scene and the second individual was flown by Black Hills Lifeflight to Monument Hospital with life threatening injuries.

The Federal Aviation Administration and National Transportation Safety Board have been notified and are investigating the incident.

For additional information concerning this incident please contact the National Transportation Safety Board Media Relations Office. (<https://www.nts.gov/news/Pages/default.aspx>)

No injuries to firefighters, civilians, or domestic animals were reported.

Agencies responding included Pennington County 911, New Underwood Volunteer Fire Department, Rapid Valley Volunteer Fire Department, Pennington County Sheriff's Office, Pennington County Emergency Management, Pennington County Search and Rescue, Black Hills Lifeflight, Federal Aviation Administration, National Transportation Safety Board, South Dakota Game Fish and Park Department, South Dakota Highway Patrol, Rapid City Fire Department and Ambulance Service, West River Electrical Cooperative, local ranchers and neighbors.

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Frame by Frame Firefighting

By COLE KLEINWOLTERINK

In sports, elite athletes are often called “students of the game.” They don’t just practice and then score touchdowns on Sundays. These professionals are also studying film from games and practice, analyzing their own performance and their opponents to gain an edge. Players like Peyton Manning or Ray Lewis became legendary not just for their physical talent, but for the hours they spent breaking down plays to refine their strategy and execution. Firefighting, much like football, is a team-driven, high-stakes profession that can benefit from the same approach.

We already know the value of fireground footage. Helmet cams and rig-mounted GoPros have been used to review tactics, decision-making, and crew performance. But because of privacy, liability, and agency policy concerns, especially when victims or patients are involved, recording actual incidents must be done carefully and within your agency’s guidelines. Although there is great benefit to this footage, this article isn’t about filming emergency scenes, instead, it focuses on a vastly underused tool: recording training drills. While training will always carry some artificiality compared to the real thing, it’s where we build muscle memory, decision-making habits, and crew coordination. Adding video to that process can change the way firefighters see their performance, identify areas for growth, and sharpen both their technical and mental game.

There are a variety of camera options for capturing training. Fire service-specific helmet cameras, like Fire Cam, are built to handle heat and smoke better than standard consumer

models. Many firefighters prefer them over action cameras like, GoPros, for interior firefighting because of their heat resistance and durability, although I will say that I personally had luck using GoPros in both live fire and non-live-fire training environments. One other advantage of the action camera is that they are great for mounting in various spots, such as on an SCBA shoulder strap using a backpack-style mount or on the side of a vehicle or training tower, using a magnetic mount. Even if you don’t own a purpose-built action camera, a simple smartphone placed in a location that captures the entire drill can be effective. Some thermal imaging cameras (TICs) also allow for video recording, which can be especially valuable in low-visibility environments, whether using real or artificial smoke. In the end, the best camera is the one that accurately captures the drill and fits the training environment—now let’s explore why it’s worth putting it to use.

SEE WHAT REALLY HAPPENED

On emergency scenes, time perception can be distorted, and memories of events can be incomplete or biased. Even in training, with lower stress and more control, this still happens. Video removes that distortion, giving firefighters an exact record of what happened, how fast (or slow) it unfolded, and where adjustments are needed. Take mask-up times as an example. A firefighter might clock an impressive 10 second mask-up during a calm, stand-alone skill practice, but in a full-speed evolution, after stretching a line and forcing a door, their mask-up takes over a minute. That’s not failure, it’s just the current operational reality. But by seeing this on camera, they now have



Body mounted camera.

accurate data to work from and can train accordingly. Perhaps when performing future mask-up drills they will first elevate their heart rate with physical activity before mask-up to simulate real conditions.

SELF-CRITIQUE AND ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Motivated firefighters are often their own toughest critics. Video lets them see their performance from other perspectives, rather than just from the narrow perspective of their own role. A nozzle firefighter, company officer, and engineer will have three different perspectives of how a line stretch went, but watching the footage together reveals the full picture: hose layout, crew positioning, communication, and task sequencing. Just as a football team reviews game film, reviewing drill footage allows firefighters to spot nuances they may have missed in the moment: kinks or pinch points

that slowed the advance, inefficient movements, or opportunities to shave seconds off critical tasks. From my experience, this outside-looking-in perspective is one of the fastest ways to improve.

BETTER DEBRIEFS, BETTER DRILLS

Some of the best training debriefs happen when crews watch themselves on screen. Often, the review becomes firefighter-led, with members asking questions, proposing solutions, and discussing small details that make a big difference. Video is unbiased and it shows both the strong points and the mistakes without the haze of adrenaline or memory gaps. More importantly, it guides future training and many times motivates crews for training. More times than once, after a video debrief, the crew decided to perform the same drill to try something that they discussed in the debrief.

As firefighters we are great at finding mistakes. But to be clear, video isn’t just for finding faults, it’s also a powerful tool for positive reinforcement. Company officers can use it to highlight strong teamwork, smooth execution, and effective decision-making.

Recognizing what’s done well builds confidence, reinforces good habits, and boosts morale. That said, recording drills requires a supportive training culture. If video becomes a “gotcha” tool used to embarrass or one-up, it will backfire. A culture where training is viewed as a place to make mistakes, try new approaches, and learn is necessary whether you are recording it or not. Training is NOT a test, it is preparation. When used in the right environment, video can be a safe, unbiased coach. It helps firefighters visualize how they operate, compare that to how they think they operate, and close any gap that may exist.

Professional athletes don’t just practice then show-up on game day, rather, they watch the tape, learn from it, and adjust accordingly. As professionals in our industry, firefighters can benefit in doing the same. Recording drills transforms the training ground into our own film room, where every evolution becomes an opportunity to think more clearly, act more decisively, and perform more effectively when the tones drop.

Cole Kleinwolverink is a member of the Waukee Fire Department, Granger Fire Department, and Fire Science instructor at Des Moines Area Community College. Feel free to reach out to him at kleinwolverink@gmail.com with any questions, comments or inquiries.



Stationary camera of whole drill.

U.S. Fire Administration Firefighter Fatality Notification

The following are U.S. Fire Administration Firefighter Fatality Notifications of firefighters who have died from across the United States. The South Dakota Fire Service extends its thoughts to the family and friends of these firefighters.

• **JONATHAN ASHWORTH**, 23, DeRidder, LA, died July 15, 2025. Jonathan was a volunteer firefighter/operator with Beauregard Parish Fire District 4 and had attained six years of service. Firefighter Jonathan Ashworth was responding to an emergency medical call at approximately 3:35 a.m. on July 15, 2025, when his personal vehicle left the roadway and crashed. He was fatally injured in the crash and pronounced deceased at the scene.

• **JASON MCGLONE**, 51, East Branch, NY, died July 17, 2025. Jason was a volunteer firefighter with 25 years of service with the East Branch Fire Department and currently the assistant chief. Assistant Chief Jason McGlone arrived at the scene of a crash involving a motor vehicle and a utility pole at approximately 9:30 p.m. on July 17, 2025. Shortly after arriving, Assistant Chief McGlone repositioned the pumper rescue truck he was driving to distance his vehicle from sagging electrical wires. However, he was unaware that the wires had become entangled with the apparatus and were in contact with the vehicle's roof. Assistant Chief McGlone was electrocuted when he exited the rescue pumper. Personnel on-scene immediately began attempts to resuscitate Assistant Chief McGlone with CPR and the use of an automatic external defibrillator (AED). Despite these efforts, Assistant Chief McGlone could not be revived and was pronounced deceased.

• **AMIE S. LEE**, 61, Van Dyne, WI, died on July 14, 2025. Amie was the firefighter-safety officer with the Van Dyne Fire Department and had attained 13 volunteer years of service. On July 1, 2025, Firefighter-Safety Officer Amie Lee was working in the fire station when she fell and suffered a serious knee injury. About two weeks later, Firefighter-Safety Officer Lee reported difficulty breathing while at home during the early morning hours of July 14. Emergency personnel provided care on the scene before transporting Firefighter-Safety Officer Lee to the hospital, where she was pronounced deceased. The suspected cause of death is pulmonary embolism caused by a blood clot from the knee injury sustained at the fire station.

• **RAYMOND "RAY" A. MOREAU**, 60, Plainville, CT, died July 27, 2025. Raymond was a volunteer firefighter with 35 years of service with the Plainville Fire Department. On July 27, 2025, at approximately 6:20 a.m., the Plainville Fire Department was dispatched to a residential structure fire. Multiple fire units from the Plainville Fire Department arrived on scene. Firefighter Raymond Moreau was working on scene and standing outside of the house when a piece from a nearby fire apparatus broke free and struck him, causing catastrophic injuries to his leg. Firefighter Moreau was transported to a hospital where he succumbed to his injuries during surgery.

• **NICHOLAS "NICK" VAN DAM**, 37, Murdo, SD, died July 26, 2025. Nicholas was a volunteer firefighter and currently a captain with the Murdo Volunteer Fire Department and had attained eight years of service. While responding to the War Creek Fire (Jones County, SD) in a 2,000-gallon tender, Captain Nicholas Van Dam was involved in a motor vehicle accident. Captain Van Dam was ejected from the vehicle as it left the roadway and rolled. Captain Van Dam sustained fatal injuries and was pronounced deceased at the scene.

• **JAIKUS HODGE**, 26, Port St. Lucie, FL, died July 22, 2025. Jaiurus was a firefighter/paramedic with the St. Lucie County Fire District and had attained three years of career service. While on duty on July 21, 2025, Firefighter/Paramedic Jaiurus Hodge became ill and was sent home. The following day on July 22, 2025, while at his home, Firefighter/Paramedic Hodge felt worse and called for help. Firefighter/Paramedic Hodge was transported to a local hospital where he later passed away. The cause of death has yet to be determined.

• **MICHAEL EUGENE PHILLIPS**, 66, Marble Falls, TX, died July 5, 2025. Michael was the current chief of the Marble Falls Volunteer Fire Department and had attained 30 years of career service. Chief Michael Phillips went missing while responding to a call for service on July 5, 2025, during severe storms and flooding that impacted central Texas. The emergency vehicle Chief Phillips was driving was swept off the roadway by floodwaters. The vehicle was later discovered, but Chief Phillips was not located with it. After days of searching, the Marble Falls Area Volunteer Fire Department announced the end of watch for Chief Phillips on July 25, 2025.

SDFA OFFICER REPORTS

When the Helpers Need Help

This month my inbox was inundated with excellent articles, and I had to make a tough choice, mainly which one to use to provide the best support for you as the frontline people in our state. However, this article by Chief Bob Reardon, almost screamed to be relayed to you. Chief begins his article with this paragraph: "When are they going to get over this?" Someone asked me this recently, referring to our firefighter-paramedics and a tragic incident that shook our community to its core. That question made it clear how important it is to keep speaking up about what this work demands from the people who answer those calls." (Reardon, Firefighter Nation). The incident remains undisclosed and the reality is that the particular situation is somewhat irrelevant. Suffice it to say, the incident overwhelmed the usual coping mechanisms of the department. Maybe that comment goes right past you. It just might be that your coping mechanisms overwhelmed. You just might be one of the people who have been blessed not to have your world rocked by a situation that overwhelmed your ability to cope (I know that is not me). However, if you have had a significant loss in your department or area, I am guessing that question hits home, and maybe you are asking that same question yourself, "When am I going to get over this?"

Reardon goes on to ask, do you wonder sometimes, if you have become desensitized to tragedy? Has "black humor" seemed to replace compassion? Maybe, maybe not, but this is not about being "cold" it is how we have learned to cope with the relentless barrage of tragedy that we have experienced in our time of service. Reardon notes that over his career he saw a lot of human suffering and tragedy, that didn't seem to bother him too much, until this one hit close to home. In terms of history and experience, Chief Reardon is a career



Rodney Veldhuizen, Chaplain

"At the end of the day, you all know me, I am the "Mental Health" guy who harps at you all the time. However, I am not going to quit, because I am a stubborn Dutchman. However, all my cajoling is not going to help, without the support of the people wearing the white helmets!"

firefighter in a major metropolitan area, was a newspaper photographer who witnessed horrendous things, and for the most part was able to process those events with some detachment. The challenge is most of us respond in our own home towns and most of the people who we are called to help are friends, family or neighbors. Most of our calls "hit too close to home". When that happens, emotional detachment goes right out the window? What do we do when we just cannot "get over it"? Trust me I have been there.

When calls are hitting too close to home, supporting each other is not just about providing counseling after an event. It is not an Incident Debrief when things have been traumatic. What is needed is a mindset where mental health is prioritized every day. It means being comfortable talking about stress and trauma, it means letting everyone on the department know that they are never alone. I like what Reardon says, "You must build unbreakable trust with your people so they can come to you about anything, knowing you'll do whatever it takes to help them and their families. That's not a nice-to-have. It's a responsibility. We owe it to OUR teams who dedicate their lives to protecting others to ensure they feel supported, heard, and valued."

The article goes on to explain what his department did to help processes the loss, and if you want to know more, it is found in Firefighter Nation, June 25, 2025 edition. What I read could be a blue print for each of our regions to help support each other in times of those events when it

hits just a little too close to home. What he said after that is equally if not more important than recounting the process the department used. For Chief Reardon was able to recognize that getting help isn't a weakness, it is strength. To his credit, he did not claim this insight as his own, but noted it was one of his firefighters (someone under his command) who saw what was happening with him, that allowed him to ask for help. Like every firefighter, particularly officers, Reardon states: "I said I couldn't get help because I am the chief. This firefighter looked me in the eye, knowing I was the chief, and said, "Or, you can show people how strong you are by getting help." That comment was all it took for Reardon to reach out for help. The question is what is it going to take for you to ask for help? I have told my story; I was stubborn and held out for almost 30 years. That is not a model to follow by the way.

At the end of the day, you all know me, I am the "Mental Health" guy who harps at you all the time. However, I am not going to quit, because I am a stubborn Dutchman. However, all my cajoling is not going to help, without the support of the people wearing the white helmets! If we are going to change the culture of fire service, where asking for help is a sign of strength not weakness, the best way is to follow the direction of Chief Reardon and lead the way.

Blessings,

CHAPLAIN RODNEY V

Bill would make assaults on first responders a federal crime

The proposed legislation is named in honor of fallen Kansas City firefighter/paramedic Graham Hoffman, who was fatally stabbed by a patient

A new proposed bill honoring fallen Kansas City firefighter/paramedic Graham Hoffman aims to protect first responders from violence.

Hoffman, a three-year veteran of the Kansas City Fire Department, died after being stabbed by a patient during an ambulance transport on April 27.

The Graham Hoffman Act, introduced by Sen. Eric Schmitt (R-Mo.) and Maggie Hassan (D-N.H.), would make any assault

on a police officer, firefighter or EMS provider a federal crime.

"Graham Hoffman was a courageous firefighter/paramedic whose life was tragically cut short at the hands of a known criminal who had been released from custody shortly before the attack," Schmitt said in a statement. "This tragic loss underscores the urgent need to protect our firefighters and first responders, who put their lives on the line to serve our communities."

Legislators hope the bill will serve as a deterrent to anyone considering violence against a public safety professional.

"First responders put their lives on the line every day to keep our communities safe, and they deserve our protection when they answer the call to help others," Hassan said in a statement. "This bill honors the memory of fallen heroes by holding criminals that attack those who serve and protect our communities fully accountable for their crimes and sending a clear message that targeting and attacking first responders will not be tolerated."

DEPARTED FIREFIGHTERS

Nicholas Van Dam 1987-2025

Nicholas Patrick Van Dam, 37, of Murdo, SD, passed away tragically on Saturday, July 26, 2025, doing what he loved-serving as a firefighter-while responding to a local grass fire.

A funeral service was held Aug. 1, 2025 at the Harold Thune Auditorium in Murdo. Nick's burial was at the Murdo City Cemetery.

Born on Nov. 3, 1987, in Pierre, SD, Nick was the beloved son of Terry and Gayle (Thompson) Van Dam. He spent his early years in Eagle Butte and Faith, SD, before moving to Murdo in 1999. Nick was an active participant in school sports, excelling in basketball, football, and track at Jones County High School, where he graduated in 2006.

After high school, Nick pursued his passion for automotive technology at Lake Area Technical Institute in Watertown, SD, graduating at the top of his class. He returned to Murdo and became the service and shop manager at Murdo Car Sales, a role he took great pride in. Beyond his mechanical talents, Nick was dedicated to his community, generously offering his expertise to friends, neighbors, and anyone in need. He became a certified firefighter with the Murdo Volunteer Fire Department and was serving as captain at the time of his passing. His commitment to helping others and his unwavering courage will be remembered by all who knew him.

On July 23, 2013, Nick earned his most cherished title as DAD

with the birth of Max Charles. A few years later, Nick married his soulmate Shannon on Oct. 22, 2016; through this union gave Nick the opportunity to show how truly great he was as a father with the unconditional love he was able to show to his two bonus children Natalie Ann and Hayzen Daniel. Nolan Myron completed this blended family on March 26, 2019. Nick's family was the heart of his world. He was an incredible father and husband. He was not only a loving partner but also an exceptional role model for their children. Nick's devotion to his family was evident in every aspect of his life. He always went above and beyond to ensure that everyone in the family felt cherished and supported. Whether it was helping with homework, attending school events, weekly game night at home with his wife and kids, or the memorable vacations they took together, he truly made every moment count. He will always be remembered as a pillar of strength and love, someone who made their family whole.

Nick's most unforgettable trait was his infectious smile and resonant laugh, capable of brightening any room and warming

the coldest of days. His sense of humor and warm-hearted nature brought immense joy and laughter into everyone's lives. Nick had a unique talent for making

everyone feel special and important, always offering a listening ear and wise advice. As an avid outdoorsman, he found great joy in taking his children hunting, fishing, to sporting events, golfing, and loved dancing any chance he could get. Nick was a man who could achieve anything he set his mind to.

Nick's spirit will continue to shine brightly through the lives of those he cherished most, his wife, Shannon, and his children, Nolan, Max, Hayzen and Natalie. He is also survived by his father Terry (Tammy), his siblings Travis Van Dam, Katie (Ben) Kreklow, Kayla (Steven) O'Dell and Cole (Holly) Venard, and his grandmother, Margaret Thompson.

He was preceded in death by his mother, Gayle Van Dam, and his grandparents, Carv Thompson, and Charles and Marilyn Van Dam.

Nick's legacy as a devoted father, loving husband, son, brother, and cherished friend will forever remain in our hearts.



Firefighter/-Chaplain Harry D. Hilgemann 1937-2025

Fire Chaplain Harry Don Hilgemann, 88, Rapid City, SD, passed away on July 30, 2025.

Chaplain Harry Hilgemann was born on Jan. 5, 1937, in Leola, SD to Christina (Kamerer) and Calvin Hilgemann. Harry was the youngest of two children. He attended school in Leola, where he met and married his sweetheart, Rosina Job on Aug. 27, 1957, and children soon followed: Kelly, Brett, and Kim.

Chaplain Hilgemann's work moved the family to various places in South Dakota: Murdo, Presho, Dupree, Brookings, Kadoka, Nisland, Wall, and Winner, along with stints in Montana, Washington, Michigan, and Georgia. Harry and Rosina spent most of their retirement on their property in a beautiful setting in the Black Hills.

Chaplain Hilgemann worked for many years with the Soil Conservation Service and retired in 1994. But actual retirement

was not for him, so he did over the road trucking for a few years, along with driving a local bus, and finally working as a conductor for the 1880 Train.

Never one to stay down, his favorite side job was volunteering for various fire departments and ending up with his beloved friends at the Doty Volunteer Fire Department, where eventually he became a Fire Chaplain.

Chaplain Hilgemann enjoyed hunting, fishing, and gardening. One of his proud moments was being selected as one of the individuals chosen to pick the 63' spruce tree from the Black Hills National Forest to be placed at the US Capitol in Washington DC in 1997 on behalf of the state of South Dakota.

This tree was memorialized in an original art piece by Jon Crane titled "America's Holiday Tree" which was gifted to Chaplain Hilgemann.

Chaplain Hilgemann was a



Murdo Volunteer Fire Department mourns the loss of captain

The Murdo Volunteer Fire Department is deeply saddened to announce the death of Nicholas (Nick) Van Dam, 37, of Murdo, SD.

Nick passed away on July 26, 2025 in a motor vehicle accident involving a fire apparatus as he was responding to the War Creek Fire in rural Jones County. The War Creek Fire has burned 2,640 acres.

Nick dedicated eight years of service volunteering for the Murdo Volunteer Fire Department and has held the position of Captain for the last six years. He was an avid outdoorsman, loved playing sports; especially golf, and worked as the parts and service manager at Murdo Car Sales.

Most importantly Nick was the ideal family man. Nick relished in being able to attend his kids sports and academic activities and spend any quality time with them. Nick leaves behind his wife and four children.

The Murdo Volunteer Fire Department asks that you respect the families and departments privacy during this difficult time. More information about the memorial will be published as it becomes available.

If you need additional information, please contact Brent Long, SD-LAST, at 605-877-2840.

Shortage of volunteer firefighters could force more towns to move to paid firehouses, costing taxpayers

By TOM HANSON and TREY SHERMAN

Nearly 70% of the fire crews working in departments across the country are volunteers, according to the National Fire Department Registry. These dedicated civil servants serve on the frontline, keeping smaller communities safe, but that safety net is shrinking due to a growing shortage of volunteers. (Edit: In South Dakota 96.6% of the Fire Service and 85% of the Ambulance services are volunteer based)

Albert Osterman, 21, has trained for more than 150 hours to become a firefighter. A volunteer in Hastings-on-Hudson, NY, he does the job with a deep sense of purpose.

"My father passed away in 2020, and the EMS crew that helped was from this fire department," Osterman told CBS News. "And so, after that, I was like, 'Yeah, I want to help people the way they helped me.'"

He works at one of nearly 20,000 volunteer firehouses nationwide, which save taxpayers an estimated \$46.9 billion a year — \$4.7 billion just in New York State, according to the Association of Fire Districts of the State of New York.

"Were it not for the fire departments, those communities would simply fall apart. We're going to rely on volunteer firefighters forever in this nation," said Steve Hirsch, chair of the National Volunteer Fire Council.

But between 1985 and 2020, the number of volunteers dropped

by more than 20%, according to the NVFC. At the same time, the number of emergencies they're called to has more than tripled.

"There are fire departments across this nation that are responding to thousands of calls every year. They're wearing out people. They're burning them out," Hirsch said.

Osterman said that in some cases, a lack of resources has "led to, unfortunately, more deaths."

Some lawmakers have been fighting to recruit young people through incentives, such as proposed legislation that would provide student loan forgiveness for volunteer firefighters. When asked if he thought those initiatives could help, Osterman seemed optimistic.

"If there's a financial incentive that can help to get education, I'm sure it would boost numbers tremendously," he said.

"I think it's a fantastic idea," Osterman added. "As a student, and a student that knows a lot of other students that are firefighters, it would be a big de-stressor for a lot of people."

Some towns have already converted from volunteer to paid crews. Without more volunteers, towns like Hastings-on-Hudson could face a similar choice. For now, Osterman is still answering the call — motivated not for a check, but to fulfill his civic duty.

"He was a Navy man," Osterman said of his father. "He was a big fan of serving his country and serving his community. I think he'd be proud of me for it. Call me crazy, for sure, for doing it, but he'd be happy."

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SDFA OFFICER REPORTS



Charlie Kludt, President

"The Fall Conference will be at the Spearfish Holiday Inn Convention Center 10-12 October. Register for the conference under Events on the SDFA website. And we'll be looking for a couple groups of 7-8 people per group to be part of a quick focus group for the SDSU Volunteer Fire Service Research project."

Slow and Steady

First and foremost, on behalf of the SDFA Board of Directors, I wish to convey our condolences and continued prayers of healing for the family of Nicholas Van Dam and the Murdo Volunteer Fire Department. Nick was fatally injured in the line duty responding to a wildfire in July. My wife and I attend a small country church, and like any congregation, the variety of ages is from a few days old, to what

seems like 138 years old. The personalities vary from extroverted and outgoing, to quiet and enjoying the surrounding conversations. In my mind, I began comparing and correlating congregations to the fire service. We all have one person who was always in a hurry. When everyone was reading aloud, they ignored the commas and pauses everyone else was taking and were a couple counts ahead of everyone else. Kind of like the person who leaves the station with the first truck before there

is crew. They want to get there first, but have to wait before they can do what's next. Then there's the person who is two words behind. They are finishing the last two words when everyone is pausing and are saying, "Amen," all by themselves. Kind of like a water tender truck. No hurry. Slow and steady. Still getting there and getting the job done. When it's over, we all shake hands, we're glad you're here, and go on our way. Our Fall Fire Conference speakers, Rodney Foster and Tom Merrill, will be emphasizing the importance of using everyone's knowledge and abilities on a volunteer department and on scene. The importance of working together, keeping the goal of helping those in need, and going home safely when it is all over. The Fall Conference will be at the Spearfish Holiday Inn Convention Center 10-12 October. Register for the conference under Events on the SDFA website.

And we'll be looking for a couple groups of 7-8 people per group to be part of a quick focus group for the SDSU Volunteer Fire Service Research project. The SDFA Board will hold the fall board meeting on 10 October in Spearfish prior to the start of the Fall Fire Conference. The storms that have been ravaging the upper Great Plains have been a testimony to the volunteer spirit of helping those in time of need. For those areas that have been hit by some of the storms, I hope you were safe and will persevere as you keep moving forward with cleanup, repairs, and rebuilding. Schools are back in full swing and all the activities that go with it. Have an enjoyable Labor Day weekend. Stay safe,

CHARLIE KLUDT,
President



Don Ward, Vice President

"District Fire Schools will soon be happening and the SDFA is finalizing plans for the Fall Conference Oct. 10-12 in Spearfish. Also, the NVFC will be in Rapid City Sept. 21-24 for their Fall Conference and board meetings."

other, both physically and mentally, attend trainings, grow your knowledge and meet new people.

DON WARD,
Vice President

Thoughts from the Tail Board

As I write this month's *Thoughts from the Tail Board*, I decided to change the name. Thought it was better from an old firefighter. I was at the funeral for Nick VanDam. What a terribly heart wrenching day. A gym full of family, friends, firefighters, law enforcement, EMS, citizens of Murdo and even politicians. Once again it reminds every one of us how our lives can change in a second. How precious this thing called life really is. A thought from the tailboard. I wonder when will it ever end, the tragic loss of firefighter's lives? The family would give everything they possess to get Nick back, and so wouldn't the other families of those who have gone before. During the service it was said that for Nick this wasn't just a commitment, it was a calling. We tell ourselves we will never forget and will always remember and honor the fallen. How do you do that? How will you remember and honor Nick? Maybe the simplest way is best. Just slow down. Take time to be sure you have all the proper PPE on. Be aware of what's going on around you. Be in charge where you are in con-

trol. Rest in peace Nick. Each month Rod Veldhuizen provides some great thoughts on our mental health. We all need to do a self-evaluation now and then. But sometimes I wonder. It seems that most of the tips we hear are after some sort of major incident or huge nearly life changing event. Call that 800 number. Talk to someone. But, what about the small, almost insignificant events? Those little ones that just "pop up." Like, oh crud I forgot to pay a bill, or I totally spaced doing something important or I don't know why my spouse said that. Don't these add up too? We need to watch out for the little things as much as the big ones. Don't forget the SD Firefighters Association Fall Conference in Spearfish Oct. 10 & 11. The two instructors have what I'm sure will be a very interesting and pertinent message for everyone. It doesn't matter about your rank, years in the fire service, or anything else. Come and rub elbows with a bunch of other firefighters, that's part of the fun and learning. The South Dakota Fallen Firefighters Memorial Service will be held this same weekend. Thankfully, we didn't have to add a name to the memorial this year. Next year we will add Nick



Denny Gorton, Retired Treasurer/Past President

"Each month Rod Veldhuizen provides some great thoughts on our mental health. We all need to do a self-evaluation now and then. But sometimes I wonder. It seems that most of the tips we hear are after some sort of major incident or huge nearly life changing event. Call that 800 number. Talk to someone."

Van Dam's name. Rick George a few weeks ago posted on our Facebook page the cost of putting on the annual State Fire School. In case you missed it, the total cost is a little over \$98,000. Instructors, motel rooms for those instructors, noon lunches, breaks, registration. There are so many small and large moving parts to fire school it's hard to see the whole picture.

As a long-time Board member, I can remember when fire school cost \$30-\$40,000. Times are a changing. Well with that, I'll close for another month and quit boring you. Take care of yourself and someone close to you.

DENNY

**ACTION PHOTOS
NEEDED!**

Please send them to
jeff@southdakotafirefighter.com
along with information to explain the photo.

Rapid City Fire Department Ben Franklin Award

The Rapid City Fire Department is incredibly proud to announce that Firefighter Kyle Steen, Firefighter Nick Jasnoch, and Firefighter Morgan Helton, have been honored with the Ben Franklin Award for Valor at Fire-Rescue International in Orlando, FL.

This national award, presented by the International Association of Fire Chiefs, honors firefighters for their expert training, professional service, and dedication to duty displayed through their actions that saved a human life.

On April 9, 2024, while serving on Medic 1, Firefighters Steen, Jasnoch, and Helton responded to a vehicle that had crashed into the second and third floor of a three-story apartment building, and ruptured the main gas line.

Recognizing the occupants were in immediate danger, they quickly extricated a female patient suffering from multiple critical injuries. They performed life saving measures and to our knowledge, this patient is still alive today. Two other occupants in the vehicle were not as fortunate.

This incident stands as a powerful example of the mission and spirit of the fire service.

We also want to acknowledge that many other crews responded that night, all of whom faced uncertainty with strength and commitment.

Please join us in congratulating Firefighters Kyle Steen, Nick Jasnoch, and Morgan Helton on this well-deserved recognition.

We are beyond proud to have them represent the Rapid City Fire Department.

SALEM AREA FIREFIGHTERS WORK ON CERTIFICATION

Firefighters from Salem and nearby communities participated in a Firefighter I & II State Certification class last Wednesday in Salem. A house slated for demolition served as the training site, giving new firefighters the opportunity to practice hands-on skills required for certification.

Justin Hageman, a member of both the Salem and Montrose Fire Departments, led the session as the state-certified instructor.

A group of firefighters worked on proper ladder technique as part of their training.

(The Special, Salem, July 24, 2025)



Congratulations to the Rapid City Fire Department! We proudly recognize firefighters Kyle Steen, Nick Jasnoch, Morgan Helton and Fire Chief Jason Culberson as recipients of the 2025 International Association of Fire Chiefs Ben Franklin Award for Valor.

Arlington house fire

A devastating house fire occurred early Wed., July 30 in Arlington, taking the life of 17-year-old Chloe Schliesman and leaving her family without a home.

Fire crews were called to a residence at 309 S. Fourth St. at 5:44 a.m. on July 30. According to Arlington Fire Chief Trevor Keating, an adult woman and four children were inside the home when the fire broke out. Upon arrival, firefighters encountered heavy smoke and flames coming from the lower level and were informed that someone was trapped in the basement.

Despite efforts to enter the home, dangerous fire conditions forced firefighters to retreat. The mother and three children escaped the blaze, but Chloe did not. The mother was transported to Brookings Health System for treatment of smoke inhalation.

The fire is currently under investigation, although officials say it does not appear to be suspicious. The home was declared a total loss.

Multiple agencies assisted at the scene, including fire departments from Badger, Lake Preston, Volga, South Shore and Brookings, as well as local ambulance services, the Kingsbury County Sheriff's Office, Emergency Management and the South Dakota Fire Marshal's Office.

The Arlington Fire Department expressed gratitude for the overwhelming support from mutual aid partners, the community and area businesses.

"The (AFD) wishes to thank all our mutual aid partners who responded to this incident as well as the community and area businesses who donated water and

food," Keating wrote in a press release.

Chloe Schliesman's funeral was at 11 a.m. on Wednesday, Aug. 6, at the Arlington School multipurpose gym, with visitation beginning an hour earlier. She will be buried at Osceola Cemetery #2 in Marvin, SD. In her memory, the family is en-

couraging donations to the local fire departments.

Donations for the Schliesman family are being accepted at Cor-Trust Bank in Arlington, 114 S. Main St., or can be mailed to P.O. Box 300, Arlington, SD 57212.

(Kingsbury Journal, De Smet, Aug. 6, 2025; written by Amy Halverson, staff writer.)

Benefits of being a 100% Department Member

When you pay your department dues, there are many advantages for your firefighters. Below is just one of the many.

INSURANCE

100% Membership provides the following:

- Basic \$10,000 of Accidental Death & Dismemberment (AD&D) insurance — 24 hrs/day
- Purchase up to \$250,000 additional AD&D
- \$10K of Line of Duty Health and AD&D, fire related health incidents, i.e. heart attack, stroke, other.

If you haven't paid your dues, it's not too late!

Don't need it...
SELL IT!
South Dakota
Firefighter
Classifieds...

jeff@southdakotafirefighter.com



Watertown rescue training

Watertown Fire Rescue would like to extend a sincere thank you to Agwrx Cooperative for the opportunity to conduct on-site training at their facility. During the exercise, WFR crews responded to a simulated medical emergency involving a 200-pound mannequin located in a room on top of an elevated 80' tower. Firefighters were required to assess and treat the patient in accordance with department protocols, then perform a high-angle rope rescue to safely bring the patient to the ground for medical transport. Training scenarios like this are invaluable in helping our crews stay sharp and ready for real-life emergencies.

2025 SE DISTRICT FALL FIRE SCHOOL

Sunday, September 14, 2025: Hosted by Yankton Fire Department

Pump Operations: Lieutenant Chris Noeldner, Watertown Fire Rescue

This class is great for the first-time apparatus pump operator to the seasoned veteran. Introduces the operator to controls including the relief valve, electronic pressure control devices, friction loss calculations, water supply, relay pumping and fire flow. Hoses and nozzles are discussed to understand the correct line and nozzle selection for fireground operations.

After classroom discussion, students will conduct hands-on exercises that feature realistic fireground scenarios. Students will understand how to correct situations like hose rupture, kink, and water loss, and understand how the gauges can inform the operator of these situations.

Advanced pump operations expands on basic skills. Pump operators will adapt to the type of water supply they will most likely encounter in their jurisdiction. They will then be relay pumping to an attack pumper at the fire scene, using gauges to estimate the available fire flow and/or calculate the fire flow based on shuttle time and be able to deliver a constant fire flow.

PPE Required: None required. Only appropriate dress for weather.

Lithium Ion Battery Fires: Lieutenant Webster Marshall, Jackson Trail Fire Department

We will discuss what happens when lithium-ion batteries are exposed to or become involved in fire directly or indirectly. Our class proposes and demonstrates different suppression techniques for fire response mitigation. Finally, we will discuss remediation processes that can be implemented after a fire has been controlled.

Hands-on portion of the course consists of several live fire lithium-ion battery burns. During these burns we will send different battery types from EV cars, scooters/e-bikes and other small batteries into thermal runaway. The final component of the hands-on portion culminates in a decontamination demonstration to emphasize the necessity of reducing contamination early and often.

PPE Required: Full structure gear.

Residential Search & Victim Removal: Zach Wisenburger & Pat Kaffar, Pheasant Country FOOLS.

This class will focus on the important task of completing a primary search in a residence quickly and efficiently. Participants will have the opportunity to learn new, or refine already learned, techniques to set them up for a successful search. Orientated searches, split search and window-initiated VES scenarios will be covered. The class will stress the importance of early and thorough primary search. Participants then learn victim removal techniques that stress the importance of keeping the victim as low as possible in the room.

PPE Required: Full structure gear with SCBA and spare SCBA bottle. Bottles can be refilled at either Yankton fire station.

Fire Departments in South Dakota Receive \$10,000 Grant from State Farm® and the National Volunteer Fire Council

A total of \$1.5 million was awarded to 150 volunteer fire departments nationwide through the Good Neighbor Firefighter Safety Program

State Farm® and the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) have teamed up for the second year to support local volunteer fire departments with funding to secure needed equipment to help keep their responders safe and protect their communities. Through this year's Good Neighbor Firefighter Safety Program, 150 departments in 44 states received a \$10,000 grant, including three departments in South Dakota.

The announcement was made on Aug. 18, a date many celebrate as Volunteer Firefighters Recognition Day. Volunteer firefighters make up 65% of the U.S. fire service, and communities across the country rely on volunteers to respond to emergencies of all kinds – from structure and wild-land fires, to vehicle crashes and medical emergencies, to natural disasters and hazmat incidents.

Many of these small-town and rural fire departments operate with limited budgets, making it difficult to meet the rising costs of the equipment and gear they need to best serve their community. These grants are a lifeline for local departments to obtain equipment that will increase safety, efficiency and effectiveness. Grants will be used to purchase a wide variety of department necessities, including personal protective equipment, EMS and rescue tools, communication devices and much more.

In South Dakota, the following volunteer fire departments will receive grants:

- Butte Volunteer Fire Department (Belle Fourche)
- Ramona Volunteer Fire Department
- Willow Lake Volunteer Fire Department

State Farm and the NVFC will also join 10 of the fire department recipients at a community engagement event this fall, which may include an open house, fire prevention event, parade or other local gathering.

"The NVFC is proud to team up with State Farm to continue the Good Neighbor Firefighter Safety Program and provide critical assistance to volunteer fire departments," said NVFC Chair Steve Hirsch. "Firefighting and rescue equipment is expensive,

and many departments struggle to find the funding they need. These grants from State Farm enable small departments to secure equipment they need to be better prepared to serve their communities and protect their responders."

"We are proud to support volunteer firefighters – the ultimate good neighbors who risk their lives daily," said Rasheed Merritt, State Farm corporate responsibility assistant vice president. "At State Farm, we're committed to helping people manage everyday risks and building safer, stronger communities."

In addition to the 150 grants, State Farm provided complimentary NVFC memberships to the first 2,000 eligible applicants to provide more responders with access to an array of benefits, including free training, support services and more. The NVFC is the leading national nonprofit association serving the volunteer fire, emergency medical, and rescue services.

Since the Good Neighbor Firefighter Safety Program launched in 2024, \$2.5 million has been awarded to 250 local fire departments. Find information about the grant program, including a list of departments receiving the grants, on the NVFC website at www.nvfc.org/statefarm.

ABOUT STATE FARM

For over 100 years, the mission of State Farm has been to help people manage the risks of everyday life, recover from the unexpected and realize their dreams. State Farm and its affiliates are the largest providers of auto and home insurance in the United States. Its more than 19,000 agents and 67,000 employees serve over 91 million policies and accounts – including auto, fire, life, health, commercial policies and financial services accounts. Commercial auto insurance, along with coverage for renters, business owners, boats and motorcycles, is also available. State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Company is the parent of the State Farm family of companies. State Farm is ranked No. 39 on the 2024 Fortune 500 list of largest companies. For more information, please visit <http://www.statefarm.com>.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL VOLUNTEER FIRE COUNCIL

The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) is the leading nonprofit membership association representing the interests of the volunteer fire, EMS, and rescue services. The NVFC serves as the voice of the volunteer in the national arena and provides

Blackfeet woman launches first Native-run equine search team

By EMMA JANE, Billings Gazette

Blackfeet citizen Diana Burd has seen firsthand the delays that come with searching for a missing person on the reservation.

Whether it's search dogs, divers or a police-led search party, it often takes days or weeks for help to reach Montana's eight rural reservations. Now, after certifying the first Native-led equine search team in the country, Burd is hoping to fill in those gaps.

"We don't have to wait for somebody to come to save us," Burd said. "We're capable of saving ourselves."

Burd's journey with search and rescue began when 3-year-old Arden Pepion went missing from a rural area of the Blackfeet Reservation in 2021 and Burd volunteered to assist the family with search parties.

"It feels like I know Arden," Burd said. "I never met her, but I know her personality because I spent days, if not years, on the river following her mom and dad having them talk about her."

It was during one of the searches for Arden that Burd first realized the value of horses in search and rescue operations. She described a time when her husband was on horseback searching a river and his horse unexpectedly dove toward one area of the water.

"He didn't know why he did it at the time, because usually horses shy from danger," Burd said. "When we got it explained to us at the scenting clinic, (we learned that) some of these horses are so curious about what the smell is that they will literally jump off banks and what not. That's exactly what his horse did."

Upon learning of horses' superior scent detection, Burd said she took another look at the spot where her husband's horse dove into the water and found out that it aligned perfectly with where Arden's boot had previously been recovered from the river.

Horses' superior scent detection is just one advantage they have over canines, Burd said. In wilderness areas, searchers on horseback can cover far more ground from a higher vantage point — benefits she noted are especially critical for the Blackfeet tribe, whose 1.5 million acres are largely wilderness.

"We're actually coming up with solutions for the Indian community," Burd said. "Solutions given by Natives for Natives."

With grant funding from Two Powers Land Collective, an equine nonprofit run by her daughter, Lynn Mad Plume, Burd brought three horses and riders to Billings earlier this month for a three-day workshop at Warfield Equestrian Park.

There, they trained with equine detection trainer Terry Nowacki for their air scent detection certification from the American Equine Scenting Association.

He had classroom work, and he actually did a lot of showing us the scent theory," Burd said.

Mad Plume said Two Pow-

ers Land Collective began as a dream she shared with her brother, Wyatt, to offer equine therapy to their tribe.

After Wyatt died by suicide last July, she felt an even stronger pull to bring that vision to life — creating a place of healing for others facing mental health struggles.

"After he passed away, we went into hyper gear and created White Rider Healing Ranch," Mad Plume said. "That's where all of our initiatives are housed — our therapeutic riding, our search and rescue, and we have different youth events."

Housing the three newly-certified search and rescue horses, Mad Plume said, is perfectly aligned with the mission of Two Powers Land Collective as well as centuries of Blackfeet ways.

"We want to instill this pride in our kids of who they are and where they come from," Mad Plume said. "We're Amskapi Pikuni (Blackfeet). We're horse people. We've always been horse people."

Mad Plume said using the tribe's connection to horses for search and rescue work also revives a traditional practice in a modern way.

"It's kind of like our horse warriors again," Mad Plume said. "And being able to call on our own people to help lead searches is instilling pride in our kids."

Echoing the cultural and ancestral connections, Burd added that she hopes to someday expand beyond the Blackfeet Reservation.

"For the missing and murdered, it's hard to watch people have to sit and wait for these resources to come in on the reservation," Burd said. "I thought on that, and why can't we step up and be on the front lines when this happens? Cut that waiting time and the jurisdictional issues. We want to bring it to every reservation."

As Burd continues searching for Arden, bringing the certified equine team to Blackfeet Country also serves as a tribute to Arden's mother, Arbana Pepion.

"She went in places that were really scary. When the water was high, she dove in there. They tied her to a rope, and she just had to look underwater and feel around and see if her baby was there," Burd said.

"We watched her do all this stuff, and there's no reason that we couldn't keep her legacy going."

She wanted to find her baby and she wanted to help people."

Now, Burd said, she is honoring a promise to Arbana, who died in 2022 without ever seeing her daughter recovered.

"We made a promise to Arden's mom that we wouldn't give up," Burd said.

"She always dreamed there would be this team that could respond in Indian country, not just for her."



Tractor fire northeast of Avon quickly extinguished

On July 24, at approximately 4 p.m., the Avon Fire Department and the Avon Ambulance were dispatched to a tractor fire northeast of Avon. When units arrived at the scene, the tractor was fully engulfed. The fire was quickly extinguished, and no other property was damaged. There were no injuries. Submitted by Dennis Dodge, firefighter, Avon Fire Department.



Specific Purpose: Share Some Cool Expressions To Guide You

By JERRY KNAPP

The purpose of this article is to share some cool expressions with you. Actually, they are hard won and time tested and highly concentrated leadership lessons. You probably have heard these or similar expressions. Their value is they summarize a life time of experience and lessons learned often passed down thru the generations. If not a condensed life time of experience at least a significant lesson(s) learned, usually the hard way. More positively, these words of wisdom often are the catalyst for your success as a leader in our American Fire Service.

Throughout my career and my life I have been blessed to have been mentored by great leaders and taught by outstanding American Firefighters. Some I learned at FDIC from extremely experienced Fire Gods like Frank Brannigan, Bill Gustin, Gerry Tracy, Arron Fields, David Rhodes, Jeff Shupe and others. Military combat veterans I have worked with and for have provided unique and valuable mentoring they learned the hard way.

Each has influenced me with some cool words. If you think about and analyze these few words, they provided a ton of excellent advice to live by and apply in certain situations in your career to grease the skids toward your own leadership success.

A word of warning, some of these may not be fair, likely gruff or politically incorrect. The world we live in is not fair or politically correct. It is life, get used to it but profit by these summaries of excerpts of life by experts. Experts that have been there, done that got

the tee shirt and has long since worn that shirt out. It is important to give credit to the mentors that teach you these and I have made every attempt below.

THINK: In my first minute of probie class, Mr. Bill Herman, a NYS Fire instructor wrote *think* on the blackboard (long before pp) and said it was the most important thing a Firefighter can do for himself (there were no female ff yet), his company and for the people he serves. Think he said, your brain is the most powerful fireground tool you have. He was right. Not thinking on the fireground resulted in a couple of really close calls I was lucky to survive. Think.

LIFE AND DEATH: *If you die in a fire at McDonalds, they will be building a new one while there are still flowers on your grave...* Capt. Bill Gustin...FDIC Fast food Fast Collapse training. You have to learn to value and appreciate how mentors like Bill could summarize a complicated issue, smile while doing it, make you remember it and have an instant impact to make you think. You know exactly what he was talking about but Bill sure brought it home into shocking reality in a few words. It should make you consider your tactical actions at fast food restaurants. A few cool words that could save you and your crew.

DID THAT BUILDING JUST LAND FROM MARS?: Frank Brannigan, FDIC. After a presentation I asked him about how the FS should deal with trusses. This was after the Hackensack NJ multi fatal collapse. Frank always got right to the point and this was no exception. He responded quickly with: "Did that building just land from Mars?" I replied with something

bright like, "No the building in question has been there at least 30 years." To which he replied a lot more louder and clearer than I would have liked while lots of FDIC attendees watched me crash and burn.... "Why don't you know it has trusses?" Followed up immediately with "Good God Jerry...Did that building just land from Mars?" I tried to shrink into the carpet at the conference center hallway as other firefighters eagerly looked on. Another valuable FDIC lesson learned. His point was precisely on target: why don't we know about all the buildings in our first due area?

FIGURE IT OUT. This is a challenge, usually offered by my boss Col. Mike Collacico, after he gave me an assignment. I'm sure he had some ideas of his own but "figure it out" really was an opportunity for me to use some innovative methods to solve a unique problem. It really was an opportunity to excel, prove myself and play the game and win or lose try to accomplish the mission win or lose. First time I heard this I thought it disrespectful. Quite the contrary, my boss had enough respect for me to think I could be successful, after I invested a significant amount of work. The challenges could be many, would I put enough effort into it, would I fold after the first failure, would I know who to put on my team to help me succeed? Col. Collacico also said, "Don't fret too long, come back and we will get it done."

"DON'T EVER GET THAT INVALID MENTALITY." Uncle Ned Hobbs, family friend. Uncle Ned was a WW2 infantry man that took part in 5 invasions in Europe to wrestle the continent away

from the Nazis. My Dad passed away when I was 5 so Uncle Ned was more than an Uncle, much more, mentor, moral compass director, sports coach, etc. A mutual friend broke his leg. After our friend left on crutches, Uncle Ned said quietly, "Jerry....don't ever get that invalid mentality, keep going you will recover stronger than you started." We know that as ff we will get hurt. Keep going, don't succumb to weakness and "don't get that invalid mentality."

YOU ARE NOT SUPERMAN, GOT IT? MSGT Perales, combat veteran, West Point. After a pickup hockey game at with staff and faculty "P" as we all knew him, put his arm around me said we needed to talk so we walked alone down the hallway. I was more than a little puzzled because I was old enough to be his father and I was on the wrong side of this father and son talk. A few months before these coolest of words micro lesson my capt. and I had a very near LODD when a routine gas leak shredded a home and nearly killed us. It was only the Grace of God we survived. P was a heavy weapons platoon leader and had several of his soldiers killed in Iraq after they survived similar experiences with ieds. He said they thought they were bullet proof (aka Superman) after that and that mentality proved fatal. Maybe we should instill in our ff they are not bullet proof. Sure, we all feel special when we don our gear. Special yes, bullet proof no. You are not superman. We get paid to take manageable risks. Don't be afraid to mentor and provide advice up the chain of command as well especially if like P you have valuable experience to share.

YOU CANT MAKE SENSE OUT OF NON-SENSE: Dr. Steve Levy said this to me in my first session of counseling after a very close call (see above). He continued, "So don't try to make sense out of it, it will drive you crazy." This was preceded by another more valuable statement, "You are not crazy. You are having a normal reaction to an abnormal situation." As FF we go to abnormal situations as a profession: fires, extractions, heart attacks, you name it. The trap here is we think it is normal, "Yup that is what I signed up for." Well, yea but we are normal human beings that may at some point, may have a normal reaction to the abnormal situation in front of us, that by the way, we are expected to resolve. The point here is this: you may be having a normal reaction and think you are crazy. Get help, look out for your fellow firefighters before something really bad happens. You all know the warning signs to look for.

TURN LEMONS INTO LEMONADE: Gordon Wren, Rockland County Fire Coordinator. Life will hand you lemons sometimes. The question is how to turn around situations that have befallen you into a win. In the case of the gas explosion above, with Gordon's help we installed a full scale natural gas training site at our fire academy. Lemons, a near double LODD into a world class training site we call Leak St to benefit all

FF to learn from our experience.

ITS ONLY A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH ...HARRY CARTER: Firefighting is like a game. We practice (train) and await the big game (alarms). On game day we do our best and usually win the battle be it a successful fire attack, a CPR save or auto extrication. Getting ready then accepting the challenge of the game is fun and the outcome can be a surprise pleasant or unpleasant. As adults we may call it satisfaction from success. It is important to realize our game is a matter of life and death, civilians and ours.

IN THE LAND OF THE BLIND THE ONE EYE MAN IS KING: Not sure who said this originally, I learned it from Carol Diemer, a West Point co-worker. Clearly, to the completely untrained, your (half baked) version of success may look tantalizing. However, if you have a full understanding of the issue your perspective maybe very different. It may be based on reality and facts that because of your two eyes (better training / understanding) that the blind and one-eyed perspective cannot see. Tread softly but make your points clear to visualize the issue and provide the correct solution.

I KNOW ENOUGH TO BE DANGEROUS: sometimes this is the litmus test we need to apply to ourselves. Do I really know enough about this topic or am I succumbing to a cursory understanding and thinking I know the full story? The US Army provided me with some really great ant-terrorism certifications and bomb awareness understanding. I was giving an interview at a local newspaper when I noticed a briefcase outside on the ground just outside the office picture window. No one was around it. I ended the interview very quickly, positioned myself on the other side of the building and notified the security guard. He promptly went and picked it up, opened it proving to all of us his "bravery." He knew enough to be dangerous, I knew enough to get out of "Dodge" quickly as a result of my training. He knew enough to be dangerous, I was lucky enough to have training equivalent to two good eyes (see above) and the reporter and newspaper staff were fat dumb and happy (see below) and rewarded him for his actions.

FAT, DUMB AND HAPPY: Clearly not politically correct but this means you were oblivious to the situation. It could *not* have been your fault and or you should have been better trained and been aware of the potential consequences. We all know people with this philosophy. They say things like, "you don't really think that is going to happen, do you?" They just skip along outside the real world looking thru rose colored glasses. As leaders in our fire service, we get paid to conduct or utilize realistic threat analysis produced by other leaders and prepare for the unthinkable. If we don't prepare, who will? To these, usually poorly trained people a good reply is:

EXPRESSIONS, PAGE 11

PROTECTING OUR HEROES

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Expressions FROM PAGE 10

Do I think this will happen, probably not but I did not think the World Trade Center would collapse either!” Darwin favors the fat, dumb and happy.

HOPE IS NOT A PLAN: I learned this the hard way saying it to my boss, an Afghanistan combat veteran. “Hope is not a plan Mr. Knapp, do you understand that!!!” he said very emphatically. To which I replied something bright like, “Yes sir, I do now.” What I meant was “I thought the reaction to my plan would be...” What I should have said and prepared a better answer was, “after careful analysis, I expect the following to happen.” To be clear, I did now know what the reaction to our action would be, but that I had researched it, and more importantly planned for it. Essentially our (secondary) reaction, if needed, to their reaction to our original action. This portion of my planning was based on a reasonable assumption (not being 100% able to predict the reaction) but with a firm plan in place to counter any expected or non-expected action. Tactically on the fireground: plan on an aggressive interior search and fire attack with first due units at a house fire but if that fails, conduct searches with VEIS with already approaching second due units.

PREPARE THE BATTLEFIELD: You can go into a game and hope for the best or you can study the films of the opposing team and prepare your team with measures, counter measures. Recognizing weaknesses that can be exploited for your teams, benefit is also a key part. For meetings that maybe contentious, prepare a colleague or two that agrees with you to help set the stage before you present your recommended course of action. Essentially, this means how can I shape the operation, discussion or exercise in my favor, before the battle.

SANITY CHECK: After you write something or develop a plan for anything, give it to a co-worker that has not been involved and ask him/her for a sanity check. Does it make sense? Did I forget anything? Are my assumptions correct? A fresh set of eyes on your work is super valuable. They will see what you thought was there but was not. They may see the value of your effort and provide a vote of confidence you can take forward with you.

COURSES OF ACTION: COA is like strategy and tactics only much more cerebral and a product of a good planning session and not time sensitive like on the fire ground. For example, no ac-

tion is always an alternative. You may not choose it and it may be the worst option but it is a possible course of action. Standing in front of a burning home and choosing no action is likely not the best strategy for life safety or fire suppression. Correct application of water in a window is an alternate course of action. In the hazmat world, it often is a very viable option, to either let the reaction run its course or understanding the tank is already empty so an entry is not required. Why risk members for no benefit? A very powerful recent example: should we risk our members to monitor the gases coming off lithium ion batteries to determine if they are dangerous? The best course of action here is to not monitor. Why, recent UL studies already did that and yes they are dangerous. UL proved the gasses coming off batteries in thermal run away are: ...33% H...36% carbon monoxide 9% methane and 22% carbon dioxide. The catastrophic lithium ion battery explosion in Surprise AZ is an excellent case history.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE: stated by great leaders in all professions. No further explanation necessary.

AREA OF OPERATION (AO): In military jargon the AO is the geographic area of the battlefield you/your unit are responsible for and have been assigned probably in an operations order. In leadership/management terms your AO can be as a company or department leader position with assigned responsibilities; your ao. You can also think of it as areas where you have influence to shape decisions. In Grandfather or common sense terms, it is your business or it is not.

YOU CAN'T CURE TERMINAL DUMB ASS: You have done your best to convince someone it is a bad idea. They persist. At some point you need to accept what they are going to do and observe the results and maybe pick up their pieces. Commonly associated with, “Hold my beer and watch this!”

Jerry Knapp is the Chief of the Rockland County, NY Hazmat Team, and is a 49 year veteran Firefighter/EMT with the West Haverstraw NY Fire Department. He served on the technical panel for the UL residential fire attack study. Knapp is the co-author of two books: House Fires and Tactical Response to Explosive Gas Emergencies published by Fire Engineering He is the owner of Suburban Tactical Inc specializing in fire officer and firefighter training.



Volga family displaced after fire

A family of eight is without a home after an August 8 house fire, per the Brookings County Sheriff's Office. The fire occurred at 315 Samara Avenue #15 at 2:38 p.m. A 13-year-old girl was home at the time and alerted her father, Eddie Waldner, to the fire. When firefighters arrived, heavy smoke and flames were found in the northwest corner of the house. The fire was contained, but it caused significant damage to the house. The family lost their pet cat in the fire, but no other injuries were reported. The fire seriously damaged four rooms in the house, while the rest of the residence suffered heavy smoke damage. The family consisted of Eddie and Jeanne Walder and their six children, who all lived in the home. The cause of the fire is unknown, though the owner mentioned a battery was charging for a remote-controlled car in the room where the fire started. The total damage to the home is estimated to be \$220,000. The Red Cross is currently assisting the family.

Northwest District Fire School

Sunday, September 21, 2025

Registration: 8:00AM

Isabel Fire Department



Class I: Propane Tree

Morning & Afternoon Sessions Available

Equipment Requirements: Students must have full Structural PPE (including hood) and SCBA in **GOOD & SERVICEABLE** condition that was NFPA compliant at manufacture date. If possible a spare SCBA cylinder should be brought as well.

Instructors: LFVD Deputy Chief Chad Baumgarten

Class II: Hand Tool Vehicle Extrication

Morning & Afternoon Sessions Available

This class will cover techniques to be used when hydraulic extrication tools are not readily available. This class will benefit all attendees but focuses on the challenges faced by rural wildland fire departments when they are called to be first on scene in remote areas lacking current extrication tools and techniques.

NOTE: Protective Clothing Required -- Participants must furnish approved helmet, fire boots or leather safety toe boots, safety glasses, gloves, coveralls, or turnout gear for the hands-on portion of the class. **Must be 18 years of age and have suitable Rescue or Structural PPE.**

Instructor: Darrell Hartmann Retired Fire Chief Brookings FD

Class III: Wildland Firefighting Tactics

Morning & Afternoon Sessions Available

This class will address different tactics available to firefighters when confronted with a fast moving wildland fire. Special focus will be given to alternative methods of controlling the fire. **The afternoon session will include a live fire hands on training scenario. Morning attendees are able to attend the live fire also.**

Instructor: Brent Dirk LFD Chief

Class IV: Rural Electric Hands on Trailer

Morning & Afternoon Sessions Available

This class will provide hands on training in real life scenarios involving power lines, electrical power equipment and scenarios faced by the wildland firefighter in rural settings.

Instructor – Moreau-Grand Electric

District Meeting: 12:00

School Fee: \$20.00 per Firefighter

Noon Meal: \$12.00 per Firefighter

Department Dues: \$100.00

Pre-Registration: Isabel Fire Department

For more information contact - Chad Baumgarten 605-222-9702

- Patrick Bridges – 605-769-0820



What's an inch tall and can move a fire truck?

A classified ad in the South Dakota Firefighter!

Email jeff@southdakotafirefighter.com to get your truck moving fast!

South Dakota Firefighters Association Fall Fire Conference

10-12 October 2025
Holiday Inn Hotel Conference Center
Spearfish, SD



The SDFA Board invites everyone to learn from our guest speakers and sessions for the 2025 Fall Fire Conference. Including local stories from incidents across the state, with lessons and suggestions we can all take home.

Watch for details in the monthly newspaper and social media.

SDFA Membership updates and discussions on current state fire service issues.

The open question, suggestion, and discussion session from the attendees was highly recommended and is being planned. Bring or send your topics!

Fallen Firefighter Memorial Service will be Saturday afternoon

And of course, the evening socials.

Guest Speakers Tom Merrill

“The Professional Volunteer Fire Department.”

Rodney Foster

“Rural Department Staging & Working Together”

South Dakota State University Research Team

“Helping make a Healthier Volunteer Fire Service”

Fall Conference Activities

Tom Merrill

“The Professional VFD”



Rodney Foster

“Rural Department Staging & Working Together”



SDSU Volunteer Firefighter Research

Friday: Evening Social & Meet & Greet

Saturday :

- Membership meeting & updates
- Speaker & Group sessions
- 400pm - Fallen Firefighters Memorial Service
- Dear Old Timers & Conference Social

Sunday:

- Speaker Session & Membership Discussions



These drones drop burning balls in the forest to control wildfires

By MACK DEGEURIN

On July Fourth, amid a cacophony of fireworks and flame-throwing propane grills, a seemingly ordinary lightning strike hit somewhere in Grand Canyon National Park. The resulting spark ignited surrounding dry vegetation, and strong winds quickly spread the flames for miles. Over the course of several weeks, that initial spark has grown into a blaze engulfing more than 100,000 acres, officially classifying it as a “mega-fire” and the largest wildfire of 2025...so far. As of this writing, “The Dragon Bravo Fire” has already destroyed 70 buildings, including the historic Grand Canyon Lodge.

It’s impossible to completely prevent wildfires like this one, but one of the most effective mitigation strategies is also one of the oldest. For centuries, firefighters around the world have used controlled burns, sometimes called a prescribed fire, to preemptively remove leaves, dead branches, and other dry materials that can serve as combustible fuel in the path of raging wildfires. Removing that fuel, the idea goes, should help prevent a wildfire from getting even larger and more dangerous.

Increasingly though, these controlled burns aren’t being initiated by people on the ground or from piloted aircraft overhead, but by small quadcopter drones carrying hundreds of ping pong ball-sized “Dragon Eggs.” These combustible eggs ignite small, trackable and contained fires when they are released.

Drone Amplified, a Nebraska-based startup, pioneered this system, which it calls “IGNIS” in 2017 with input from the U.S. Department of the Interior and the U.S. Forest Service. Now, eight years later, Drone Amplified’s Vice President of Business Development Dan Justa tells *Popular Science* that the company’s drones are currently operating more than 200 systems in at least 30 US states, as well as Canada, Germany, and Australia.

“This [system] allows you to cover a tremendous amount of ground and get eyes on fire for situational awareness during wildfires,” Justa said. “It also allows you to fly at night.”

MOVING FROM RECON TO INTERVENTION

Firefighters have been using drones in some capacity for well over a decade. Around 2011, state and federal agencies began deploying drones equipped with cameras to capture photos and videos—either for early surveillance or to assess damage after a wildfire. From the beginning, small, unmanned drones were viewed as more affordable alternatives to helicopters for wildlife monitoring and real-time data collection. Their compact size also lets them access areas that may be unreachable by larger,

piloted aircraft.

The Western Fire Chiefs Association estimates that around 200 fire departments across the U.S. were using drones by 2018. That number tripled within just two years. Drone Amplified represents a more recent shift toward using those drones for active wildfire mitigation, moving a step beyond basic surveillance and documentation. Drone companies focused on disaster response also gained momentum following the passage of a bipartisan 2019 bill that encouraged greater drone use by federal agencies in wildfire management operations.

“One of our North Stars is doing cool stuff with drones that actually impacts the world rather than just images,” Justa said. “A lot of drones are just flying cameras or sensors.

FIGHTING FIRE WITH FIRE

Drone Amplified’s IGNIS system, which gestated from research done by a pair of professors at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, consists of four main subsystems. According to Justa, the drone itself is a heavily modified version of the American-made Freefly Systems Alta X model. Attached is a large hopper that holds up to 450 (or around 13 pounds) of the “Dragon Egg” balls. These small plastic spheres are filled with potassium permanganate. During a controlled burn, each ball is dropped into a separate puncture mechanism where it’s injected with ethylene glycol, a compound commonly found in antifreeze. The resulting chemical reaction produces a steady, relatively cool, and controlled flame.

Once pierced, the Dragon Eggs take about 30 to 45 seconds to ignite, during which time they are launched from the drone toward their pre-programmed targets. This process can be repeated up to 120 times per minute until the hopper is empty. Firefighters can adjust the number of eggs dropped depending on the desired intensity of the burn. Each payload is also programmed to release the incendiary balls only within a specific geographic area.

Firefighters control the drone using a companion app. The drone is equipped with thermal cameras, allowing operators to see targets clearly even in smoky conditions and to monitor the progress of prescribed burns once they begin. According to Justa, the drone, its accompanying software, and the necessary training combined cost approximately \$100,000.

That sounds like a lot of money, but it’s often a more affordable option than deploying a helicopter with a full crew of firefighters. It’s also notably safer. Drones aren’t affected by smoke inhalation or the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning, allowing them to operate in more hazardous environments. There’s

the added benefit too that crashing a drone, while pricey, isn’t life threatening. The CDC estimates around 25 percent of all firefighting fatalities are related to aviation.

“It’s extremely dangerous to fly helicopters over wildfires because you have thermals, you have smoke, you can’t see anything,” Justa said. “The drones you can put up anywhere.”

All of this gives firefighters equipped with drones greater capacity and flexibility to carry out prescribed burns, tools that can make a significant difference. A 2024 study published in the *Forest Ecology and Management* found that prescribed burning, when combined with tree thinning, reduced wildfire severity by more than 60 percent compared to areas that did not receive similar treatment.

MAKING SURE DRAGON EGGS



ARE USED FOR GOOD

But there’s also the concern of ensuring that a drone capable of starting a wildfire does so only in the place it’s supposed to. To that end, Justa says the company has designed its system with safety and mitigation tools built in from the ground up.

While pilots are free to navigate the drone as needed, the hopper will only dispense the Dragon Eggs within a predetermined, geofenced area—the designated controlled burn zone. Sensors onboard can detect if the drone or its payload sustain damage. If that happens, the system automatically disables the dropper mechanism and triggers a small, low-temperature fire designed to safely burn out.

And as for the risk of hackers gaining access to the device and using it to wreak havoc, Justa says the drones mitigate risk by using radio-based encryption. He

also points out that anyone intent on starting a forest fire almost certainly has easier methods available to them. Buying a pack of cigarettes at a gas station is far cheaper and simpler than hacking a drone.

Though its most notable impacts so far have been in wildfire management, Drone Amplified’s object-dropping mechanism isn’t limited to dispensing Dragon Eggs. Last month, the company partnered with the American Bird Conservancy to drop dozens of biodegradable, lab-grown mosquito pods over Hawaiian forests in an effort to curb the area’s invasive mosquito population, which poses a serious threat to some native bird species. Justa told *Popular Science* that the company is also working with the Alaska Department of Transportation to deploy controlled explosive charges for triggering managed avalanches.

Redfield Fire Department hosts youth obstacle course

During the 4th of July, the Redfield Fire Department set up an obstacle course for the local youth to see what it takes to be a firefighter. The course consisted of carrying and dragging hose, chopping wood, spraying water on a mock house with mock flames and dragging a dummy. This was the department’s first year with the obstacle course. Kids enjoyed the activities despite the heat of the day. They hope to put on the course again next year with a few new ideas.



Firefighter of the year

The Redfield Fire Department congratulates Truck #2 Lieutenant Logen Arthurs, a 12 plus year member of the department. The American Legion chose Logen as Firefighter of the Year on March 5. Logen then moved up to the state level and was awarded the American Legion 2025 Firefighter of the Year of South Dakota at the South Dakota American Legion Department Convention in Huron, June 21. His recognition has been submitted to the national level.



Farm Equipment sparks fire in Wanblee

At around 2 p.m. on Monday, July 14 a fire started on BIA trust land outside of Wanblee. Several volunteer fire departments including Martin were dispatched to the fire. However, a rain storm ended up sending the trucks back home. While the rain made it difficult for the MVFD to work on the fire, it also helped contain and control it. Crews were sent to the location again on Tuesday to finish putting the fire out and clean up.

Local sources say that the fire was started by farm equipment and burned around 590 acres, most of which was trust land. No buildings were damaged in the fire which has been named the “New Holland Fire” after the brand of tractor that started it.

(Martin – Bennett Co. Booster II, Martin, July 23, 2025; written by Chris Docter, staff writer.)

YOU SHOULD HAVE YOUR DEPARTMENT FEATURED!

Just fill out the attached form and send it back with a group photo and we'll feature your department in an upcoming issue of the South Dakota Firefighter Newspaper.

Submitter's Name _____ Submitter's Phone # _____

Department Name: _____ Total Number of Members: _____

Volunteer _____ # Paid _____ Year Department Established: _____

Fires Per year _____ # Rescue/Extrication Calls Per Year _____ Is Your Dept. Fire & EMS Combined? _____

Pumpers _____ # Tankers _____ # Rescue _____ # Ambulance _____ Other: _____

Names in picture: (on separate form please)

Please type the names as they appear in the photo. For best reproduction, please send or e-mail the actual photo and not a photocopy or scanned copy.

Mail to: South Dakota Firefighter Newspaper,
PO Box 122, Humboldt, IA 50548
E-mail to: jeff@southdakotafirefighter.com

Officer's Name:

Office:

Boat destroyed in fire on Sheridan Lake

Boat was destroyed in a fire on Sheridan Lake Sunday.

According to the Pennington County Sheriff's Office, just before noon, Pennington County Dispatch received a call in reference to a boat explosion and fire on Sheridan Lake.

Pennington County Sheriff's Office Boat Patrol was patrolling on Sheridan Lake at the time of the incident and responded within minutes. Upon arrival, the boat was fully engulfed with flames.

With the assistance of Hill City Volunteer Fire Department, Pennington County Deputies were able to tow the boat closer to shore so the fire could be extinguished.

There were no injuries reported but the boat was a total loss. The cause of the fire is under investigation. Responding agencies include the Pennington County Sheriff's Office, South Dakota Game Fish and Parks, Hill City Volunteer Fire Department, Pennington County Dispatch and the Rapid City Fire Department Hazmat Team.

(Spearfish Black Hills Pioneer, Spearfish, July 15, 2025)

FIREFIGHTERS CONTAIN RAPID CITY HOUSE FIRE

The Rapid City Fire Department was dispatched to a structure fire in the 100 block of East College Avenue at 5:00 p.m. Friday. According to a post by the RCFD, smoke and flames were seen billowing from the doors and windows of a home.

Firefighters quickly attacked the fire and brought the blaze under control in a short amount time. No injuries were reported, and the cause of the fire is still being investigated.

(KELO-TV CBS 11, Sioux Falls, Aug. 4, 2025)

Livestock trailer caught fire with cattle inside; no fatalities reported

A livestock trailer's back wheels caught fire early Friday night on U.S. Highway 12 near Selby.

According to Selby Fire Chief Curt Rawstern the fire was due to faulty brakes, which caused the tires to ignite.

The fire was called in at 12:48 a.m. and Rawstern said it was after 3 a.m. when he returned to Selby. The trailer was hauling a load of cattle, and all livestock was able to exit the trailer safely. With the help of local produc-

ers, the animals were rounded up and sent to Mobridge Livestock until another truck was able to load them.

Rawstern said the fire did melt significant portions of the trailer's floor including the structures.

Walworth County Sheriff Josh Boll was also on scene and said how appreciative he was of the community's help. In a social media post by the Walworth County Sheriff's Office, he thanked the following individuals

and companies.

"Thank you, Selby Fire Department and Ambulance. Thank you, Perman trucking, Brian Begeman, Pat Starks, Tommy Houck, Gordon Hagstrom, Gene Zabel, Nick Larson (CHS Elevator) and Brenner Towing."

(Mobridge Tribune, Mobridge, Aug. 13, 2025; written by Clare Schoelerman, staff writer.)



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Rapid City firefighters quickly contain structure fire

At approximately 5 p.m. on August 1, the Rapid City Fire Department responded to a structure fire in the 100 block of East College Avenue. A column of smoke was visible from a distance as crews made their way to the scene. Upon arrival, smoke and flames could be seen billowing from the windows and doors. Firefighters quickly began attacking the fire and were able to bring it under control in a short amount of time. No injuries have been reported, and the cause of the fire remains under investigation. Units that responded to the scene include: Battalion 1, Truck 1, Squad 1, Medic 1, Engine 4, Truck 3, and Engine 7. From the Rapid City Fire Department Facebook page.



Fire destroys building in Butler

A fire broke out June 12 on Main Street of Butler at the Dog House which was owned by Duane Huwe. According to Bristol Fire Chief Preston Hansmeier the department was notified of the fire at 9:50 a.m.

Hansmeier said eight Bristol firefighters were on scene along with four trucks. He said they were on scene for around three and a half hours.

"We don't know exactly what caused the fire but we think it was something electrical," Hansmeier stated. He added there will be no further investigation and the building is a total loss.

"I lost a lot but am thankful nobody lost their life or was injured," Huwe said. "Most people probably thought it was an empty old building. but I put it together with passion and my personality, I liked sharing it with those passing by if they stopped to talk with me."

He stated the building was around 140 years old.

Webster Fire Department Chief Robert Kwasniewski stated the Webster Fire & Rescue were on scene for mutual aid with four trucks and 10 volunteers.

(Webster Reporter and Farmer, Webster, June 23, 2025; written by Annie Witt, staff writer.)



ACTION FIRE PHOTOS NEEDED!

Please send them to jeff@southdakotafirefighter.com along with information to explain the photo.

Milbank, Revillo Firemen Respond Rural Car Fire

Members of Milbank Fire and Rescue responded to a call regarding a car fire at 15328 482nd Ave. on Saturday, July 12, at 11:08 p.m. When they arrived, the fire- men discovered a Jeep Grand Cherokee fully engulfed in flames.

The Revillo firefighters had arrived first and extinguished the fire. Milbank's crew assisted with the cleanup afterward, according to Justin Mathiason, assistant fire chief.

(Milbank Grant County Review, Milbank, July 16, 2025)

Rapid City firefighters extinguish garage fire

A detached garage on the 400 block of E Custer Street in Rapid City caught on fire Monday afternoon, prompting a quick response from firefighters. The blaze ignited around 2 p.m. and firefighters put it out about 15 minutes later, preventing the fire from causing significant damage to the home a few feet away.

A man living there reportedly managed to back his truck out of the burning garage onto the street. The truck's front bumper melted and was immobilized. Battalion Chief Calen Maningas praised his firefighters' efforts, particularly on a hot afternoon. "They're wearing full PPE, carrying equipment, gear," Maningas said. "They're doing arduous work, trying to save lives and property. It is a hard thing that they do, especially in heat like this." The cause of the fire is under investigation.

(KOTA-TV ABC 7, Rapid City, Aug. 14, 2025)

Watertown Fire Rescue puts out car fire at Hobby Lobby

Just before 8 a.m. on Friday, June 27, 2025, Watertown Fire Rescue was dispatched to 2921 Ninth Ave. SE for a vehicle fire that the caller said may have involved a collision with a building, according to WFR.

Battalion 1, Engine 4, Engine 3 and Medic 4 responded to the early morning fire. Upon arrival, crews found a vehicle in the parking lot with smoke and flames coming from the engine compartment, WFE reported. Fortunately, the release stated, the vehicle was not threatening the building and had not made contact with it.

Watertown Fire Rescue crews quickly extinguished the fire in the engine compartment and remained on the scene for approximately 30 minutes, the release stated. The Watertown Police Department also assisted with this incident.

(Watertown Public Opinion, Watertown, July 2, 2025)

Milbank responds to false alarm of gas leak

Members of Milbank Fire and Rescue were summoned on Monday, July 21, at approximately noon to the report of a gas odor at 505 S. 2nd Street in Milbank. Firefighters checked out the residence and found no gas leak inside the residence, according to David Giesen, fire chief.

Northwestern Energy was also called to the scene and with their more advanced equipment were able to detect a small leak outside the residence at the shutoff valve, he noted.

(Milbank Grant County Review, Milbank, July 23, 2025)



What's an inch tall & can move a fire truck?

A classified ad in the South Dakota Firefighter!

Email jeff@southdakotafirefighter.com to get your truck moving fast!

Badlands District Fire School

Kadoka Fire Department

September 20th, 2025

1. LIVE FIRE TRAINING, 6-hour all day class, limit 20

Training will consist of a short AM classroom session covering basic principles of Safety, SCBA and Fire Streams. The remainder of the AM and all the afternoon will be spent doing hands-on training with Live Fire. Participants will put their knowledge and skills to use in the new two-story SDFA Mobile Live Fire Training Unit. This hands-on training will simulate conditions encountered in actual interior structure fires(live fire, heat, humidity and smoke).

Full Structural PPE and SCBA Required (PPE must be in good & serviceable condition and must include a Nomex Hood, an extra cylinder is recommended).

Instructor: SD MLFTU Instructor Cadre

2. TRAFFIC INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM, 6-hour all day class

The National Traffic Incident Management Responders Training was created by responders for responders. This course provides first responders a shared understanding of the requirements for safe, quick clearance of traffic incident scene; prompt; reliable and open communications; and motorist and responder safeguards. First responders learn how to operate more efficiently and collectively. This training covers many TIMS recommended procedures and techniques, including: TIMS Fundamentals and Terminology, Notification and Scene Size-Up, Safe Vehicle Positioning, Scene Safety, Command Responsibilities, Traffic Management, Special Circumstances, Clearance and Termination, and Telecommunicators.

Instructor: Kenny Marks, Pierre Fire Dept.

3. VEHICLE EXTRICATION, 6-hour all day class, limit 20

This course provides hands-on training for fire and rescue personnel in size-up, stabilization, hazard control, patient access, and disentanglement at automobile crashes. Emphasis is placed on proper choice, placement, and use of equipment available locally. All are employed to think outside the box and complete the extrication with hydraulic tools using the jaws, shears, and rams, along with air bags, cribbing for stabilization along with other tools available.

Protective Clothing Required

Instructor: Zane Hamiel and Blake Nielsen, Winner Fire Dept.

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Pierre Fire Dive Squad hosts intensive dive rescue training with regional teams

The weekend of August 9, Pierre Fire Department Dive Squad successfully hosted a Dive Rescue 1 (DR1) course. They welcomed instructor Steve Wilson from Dive Rescue International and the Ridgeland, Mississippi Dive Squad, back to Pierre to share his extensive knowledge and expertise. The DR1 course is an intensive 3-day, 24-hour training program that covers the latest techniques in underwater rescue and recovery, preparing teams to operate safely and effectively during water-related incidents. These specialized skills are critical when responding to water-related emergencies—ensuring the dive team can act swiftly, safely, and effectively. Also joining were members of the Mitchell Fire Department and Dive Squad, as well as the Beadle County Dive Squad from Huron.



ACTION FIRE PHOTOS NEEDED!

Please send them to
jeff@southdakotafirefighter.com
 along with information to
 explain the photo.

Butte County training

Butte County Fire Departments got together Aug 16 for some training. Butte Electric was there with their training trailer to go over electrical safety. Live fire training was also done using one of the MLFTU trailers. Later in the day the Butte Fire Department had purchased a set of extrication tools and the use of these tools was practiced.



Fire destroys home in Sunrise Housing east of Martin

Martin Volunteer Fire Department responded to a fire on Monday, July 14, at 10:19 p.m., at the Sunrise Housing community east of Martin.

The northeast bedroom of the home was completely destroyed by flames and major smoke and water damage throughout the rest of the building.

Thankfully none of the three residents were injured, however, two deceased dogs were found inside the home. The cause of the fire is currently under investigation by Oglala Sioux Law Enforcement.

(Martin – Bennett Co. Booster II, Martin, July 23, 2025; written by Chris Docter, staff writer.)

AGAR COMMUNITY FIRE DEPARTMENT



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