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The Southeast District Firefighters Association hosted their spring fire school in Volga on Saturday, April 25. See more photos inside. South Dakota State Fire School is June 11-13 in Watertown.



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# South Dakota drought forces ranchers into critical decision window

Severe conditions in Black Hills region trigger federal assistance as ranchers face forage shortages and water supply concerns

By RYAN HILL

South Dakota ranchers are facing

a countdown as drought conditions worsen across the region, with the next two to four weeks critical

in determining whether they will need to reduce herd sizes or find alternative forage sources.



## Vehicle fire reported near Arlington

On Saturday, May 16, at approximately 2:14 p.m., the Brookings County Sheriff's Office responded to a report of a vehicle fire in a field near Arlington. Deputies arrived to find a 2011 Ford F-350 fully engulfed in flames, with the fire spreading into nearby grass. The vehicle's owner, Jim Finnegan of Arlington, reported that he had parked the truck after delivering seed to the field for planting. After setting up equipment, he noticed the truck was on fire and that flames were spreading into the surrounding area. The Lake Norden Fire Department responded promptly and extinguished the blaze. Investigators determined the fire likely originated in the engine compartment, possibly due to an electrical malfunction. The estimated damage to the vehicle is approximately \$30,000, and about one-half acre of grass was burned. Agencies assisting at the scene included the Brookings County Sheriff's Office, the Lake Norden Fire Department, Badger Fire Department and the Arlington Fire Department.

Eric Jennings, past president of the South Dakota Cattlemen's Association, said ranchers must make decisions soon based on rainfall and forage growth projections.

"We need to make sure that we're going to have enough rain and forage growth by a certain date, or you need to start depopulating your cows, finding other forage, moving out of the area, bringing feed in — doing something to address the fact that there's not going to be enough forage grazing to get through the summer," Jennings said.

Water supplies drying up across region Stock dams and water supplies across the region are drying up. The worst drought conditions are centered on the Black Hills, where severe drought is already triggering automatic federal assistance payments for some counties. Jennings said the current weather pattern resembles conditions from 2012.

"The weather pattern that we're in is very similar to that 2012 year. And that was a devastating drought," Jennings said.

Fire season arrives early The dry conditions are adding fuel to a fire season that started months ahead of schedule. Brian Povandra, division chief of fire operations for the Rapid City Fire Department, said fire conditions are becoming extreme quickly.

"Fire conditions become very extreme very quickly. That was evident in the Coyote Flats fire. Usually that time of year we're not seeing that extreme fire behavior — it was a wake-up that it's here early this year and we need to be prepared," Povandra said.

Federal relief programs moving slowly Jennings said some federal relief is already in motion, but emergency programs are not moving fast enough.

"An emergency program needs that water right away. And that's maybe one thing that the state could help with — if we could get that done at a much quicker pace, it would make a big difference for ranchers," Jennings said.

The Drought Task Force met for the first time Thursday.

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## Box Elder structure fire

On April 24, the Box Elder Volunteer Fire Department responded to a report of fire and smoke visible from a residential structure in the 14000 block of Radar Hills Dr, rural Box Elder. First arriving firefighters found a free burning fire with a heavy smoke condition, issuing from the single story, residential structure with fire extending into the ceiling and roof assembly. Rapid attack by firefighters contained the fire to the structure of origin, stopping the spread of the flames to nearby structures, infrastructure and other improvements. No injuries to firefighters, civilians or domestic animals were reported. Agencies responding: Pennington County 911, Box Elder Volunteer Fire Department, Box Elder Police Department, Black Hawk Volunteer Fire Department, United States Air Force 28<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing/Ellsworth Air Force Base Fire Department, Whispering Pines Volunteer Fire Department, Rapid Valley Volunteer Fire Department, the Rapid City Fire Department and Ambulance Service, North Haines Volunteer Fire Department, North Haines Fire Corps, Pennington County Sheriff's office, the South Dakota Highway Patrol, West River Electrical Cooperative the South Dakota Fire Marshalls Office and the Red Cross Servicing Central and Western South Dakota. Photo courtesy of the Box Elder Vol-



## UPCOMING EVENTS

Email your Upcoming Event by the 10th of the previous month (ex. Aug. 10 for the September issue) to [jeff@ne-braskafirefighter.com](mailto:jeff@ne-braskafirefighter.com). There is no charge.

**JUNE 6, 2026:** North Haines Fire Department 50th anniversary, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., North Haines Fire Station, 1290 Country Road, Rapid City, SD.

**JUNE 11-13, 2026:** 140th South Dakota State Firefighters Association State Fire School, Watertown, SD.

**JUNE 27, 2026:** Jim Stevens Memorial Ride, 9 a.m., Hot Springs Fire Hall.

**DEC. 4-6, 2026:** SD Fire Chiefs Annual Leadership Conference featuring Tiger Schmittendorf, Deadwood, SD.

## ACTION FIRE PHOTOS NEEDED!

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# SDFA OFFICER REPORTS

This is one of those stories that crawled out of the Ark with Noah, but it serves my point for this article, so bear with me. The story is told of a fellow who was stuck on his rooftop in a flood. He was praying to God for help. Soon a man in a rowboat came by and the fellow shouted to the man on the roof, "Jump in, I can save you." The stranded fellow shouted back, "No, it's OK, I'm praying to God and he is going to save me." So, the rowboat went on. Then a motorboat came by. "The fellow in the motorboat shouted, "Jump in, I can save you." To this the

stranded man said, "No thanks, I'm praying to God and he is going to save me. I have faith." So, the motorboat went on. Then a helicopter came by and the pilot shouted down, "Grab this rope and I will lift you to safety." To this the stranded man again replied, "No thanks, I'm praying to God and he is going to save me. I have faith." So, the helicopter reluctantly flew away. Soon the water rose above the rooftop and the man drowned. He went to Heaven. He finally got his chance to discuss this whole situation with God, at which point he exclaimed, "I had faith in you

but you didn't save me, you let me drown. I don't understand why!" To this God replied, "I sent you a rowboat and a motorboat and a helicopter, what more did you expect?"

What does that story have in common with first responders? Simply this, all too often we get focused on one solution, missing the reality that there might be something else available to us to give us the help we need. What I am driving at is the belief and custom that if we need mental health support, we are in for long and tedious sessions with a counselor. We pic-



**Rodney Veldhuizen, Chaplain**

**"I am here to tell you that finding support early will result in a much healthier outlook, and might just prevent that dreaded PTSD diagnosis."**



## Johnson Siding called to fire

Johnson Siding Volunteer Fire Department responded to the Murphy Fire.



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ture hours and months of sitting in an office talking about things we would just as soon forget. However, what if someone is sending us a "rowboat" to help us get off that roof? What if instead of months or years, we could do something with a "one and done", or a "three and out" approach to mental health counseling? Before you suggest I have lost what few brain cells I have left, let me tell you why this might be a "game changer" for us in the first responder world.

In an article published in Firefighter Nation, Albert Stumm, a reporter for the Associated Press (not a therapist) wrote an article about the trend, or should I say, suggestion that one session therapy can make a difference for first responders. What intrigues me about this, is something I have seen repeatedly in practice, people, and not just first responders come once and I never see them again. Why? First of all, the cost! Even if we have insurance, you will probably face a waiting list. I know from experience that once a person (this may or may not have been me) decides to seek help, they don't want to be told it will be three weeks to a month before someone can see them! Most first responders, not to mention the general public has no patience for this, but again there are not enough trained therapists/counselors/psychologists (pick your flavor) to even begin to make a dent in the need of the general population. Then try and find someone who is even marginally competent to work with people like us.... Can you say "needle in a haystack"?

Then what about time off work, as most counselor offices work a 9-5 schedule, so missed time from work... What this approach offers is a modification of what is called "Solution Focused Therapy". While intentionally a shorter form of therapy than most of us have seen, it is still a multi-visit system. The single session approach invites a person to come in ready to change and then offers support for that change. If you think this is some radically new idea, it turns out that Sigmund Freud himself offered this kind of support!

How does this differ from traditional counseling? Let me borrow the words of someone who knows more than me; Sharon Thomas, is a psychologist and director of signal-session therapy at the Ross Center in Washington, D.C., "said both counselor and client enter the session with expectations." Those "expectations are that the person coming in for help, will see an improvement in their own ability to solve or handle their problems and a decline of symptoms in just once visit. Rather than asking the "Mr. Obvious" kind of questions about

a person's past or current life, the counselor asks a simple question, "What is a specific problem you are dealing with that we can develop a plan to start to address today?" If you are like me, you have no need to discuss childhood trauma, you want help addressing those memories of what took place last week!

Keep in mind, the counselor still needs to ask those questions we all like to cover up, like are you at risk of suicide or at times homicidal. (Yeah, I use those terms, not "self-harm or harming others.") Nor is this a replacement for people with serious mental health issues, but then again as a first responder, we are not quite right anyway. (That is the subject for a much longer article about the personality type of first responders). However, we are not mentally ill, a little unstable at times, but then again, a truly sane person would not run into a burning building! The other assumption behind single session counseling is that the person already walks in with strengths that will help them address their issue. (Once again, the personality type of a first responder has those strengths already.) "Single sessions also often attract a different type of client, such as someone who might be skeptical about whether traditional therapy is right for them. "It's like putting a toe in the water," (One professor said).

If you find yourself "sitting on your roof with the water rising" I would encourage you to jump into that rowboat! Quit telling others that someone is going to provide a rescue when one is in front of you. I am here to tell you that finding support early will result in a much healthier outlook, and might just prevent that dreaded PTSD diagnosis. Then keep in mind, support is not a life sentence, it might be as simple as a single appointment with a guy like me or a woman who understands this world we live in. If it doesn't work in one session, you have not wasted days of your time! As my mother used to say: "Nothing ventured, nothing gained".

Until next month, Blessings,

CHAPLAIN RODNEY

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# DEPARTED FIREFIGHTERS

## Raymond Albert Bubb

7/25/1960 - 5/10/2026

Lead Fire Department Chief, (Ret'd) Raymond Albert 'Ray' Bubb, 65, passed away peacefully on May 10, 2026 at his home in west Rapid City SD.

'Bubba', as he was known to so many, was a man of decades of selfless service, amazing achievements, a booming voice and a great smile. He was born on July 25th, 1960, in Reno, Nevada, to Walter H. Bubb (WilliamSPORT, PA) and Marilyn (Doull) Bubb (Silver Bow, MT). While Ray lived in California, his



mother worked for Ronald Reagan. Ray shared that he remembered Mr. Reagan inquiring as to how his homework was "coming along."

When Ray was only five years he lost his father, a World War II Veteran. His mother later married Bob Greene on June 11, 1966. Ray fondly recalled accompanying Bob, when he worked on Thunderbirds as an airplane mechanic. Ray remained very close to Bob over the years before his passing. During his years in Reno, he attended Earl Wooster High School in Reno, competing in diving and eventually a state diving championship, graduating in 1978.

Ray enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1978 following high school. He completed USAF Basic Military Training at Lackland Air Force Base (AFB), TX, followed by Security Specialist training at the USAF Security Police Academy at Lackland and in Airbase Ground Defense field training at Camp Bullis, TX. After graduation—having earned his coveted Security Police badge and "Blue Beret," he was assigned to Ellsworth AFB, SD. There he served with the 45th Missile Security Squadron, a specialized 300-man unit.

Airman Bubb was an active combatant in America's Cold War nuclear deterrence forces under the Strategic Air Command. During his enlistment he gained advanced academic education through the Community College of the Air Force, became a decorated Security Policeman (Security Specialist), and before his Honorable Discharge in 1982, earned the rank of (E-4) Sergeant.

In his early years and off-duty hours, Ray enjoyed spending time with friends, tinkering with his latest favorite car, playing guitar with local bands like Lar and the Lounge Lizards, and enjoying outdoor activities. Ray worked in the 80s, as a high diver at Marine Life in Rapid City, as well as in Mexico and at Elich Gardens.

Ray became an avid skier at Mt. Rose in Reno and continued to en-

joy skiing at Deer Mountain and Terry Peak and was employed by both areas. In 1984 Ray, became a volunteer with Ski for Light. Ray was currently serving as the President of the Black Hills Regional Chapter and made many lifetime friendships.

Ray started his fire service career with the Lead Fire Department in 1987. In 1989 he joined the Rapid City District Fire Crew with South Dakota State Forestry for summer fire seasons. Ray

served as Fire Chief in Lead from 1994 until 2007, when he was hired as Division Chief for the South Dakota Division of Wildland Fire at the Rapid City Field Office. Ray worked on many fires and incidents in Lead and the Black Hills area and across the nation as a fire line supervisor and incident commander.

He also responded to all risk incidents on flood emergencies in North and South Dakota and hurricane assignments in Mississippi and Louisiana. Ray worked in fire aviation management with the State of SD on training and wildland fire assignments. Chief Bubb was a sought-after fire service instructor for classes and training and was beloved by his fellow firefighters. He also served on the Pennington County Local Emergency Planning Committee for several years, including time as Chairman. Chief Bubb retired from the fire service in 2021.

Ray's personal side was more about his bond with his fellow Veterans, his brother and sister fire fighters, and among his fellow Sky for Light volunteers and countless participants.

Ray was survived by his Aunt, Marybeth Doull (Uncle James L Doull, Jr. deceased) residing in California and their sons, John and Mike Doull, numerous friends and "Lexi," the pup he adored and took care of when his friend was traveling. Ray was preceded in death by his grandparents on both the Doull and his father, William Bubb's side, his mother Marilyn, and stepfather, Bob Greene, along with several other family members.

Donations are encouraged in Ray's name to any Veteran's Group or EAFB Air and Space Museum, Lead Volunteer Department or Black Hills Regional Ski for Light.

Ray will be dearly missed by so many and from his fellow veterans and fire fighters:

Services will be Tuesday, June 9th, 2026 at the Piedmont Fire Station, followed by committal with full military honors at Black Hills National Cemetery

# U.S. Fire Administration Firefighter Fatality Notification

**JACKSON M. WARREN** On March 6, while responding to a brush fire, Shift Commander Jackson Warren, 27, Butler County Fire Protection District, Poplar Bluff, MO, was fatally injured when the fire apparatus he was driving ran off the right side of the road and overturned. Shift Commander Warren was pronounced deceased at the scene. Another firefighter who was also injured in the incident was treated and released by a local hospital.

**SCOTT R. DURFEE** On February 27, Deputy Fire Chief Scott Durfee, 54, Caddo Parish Fire District 1, Shreveport, LA, went home after falling ill while participating in a training drill at his station. Within an hour, Deputy Fire Chief Durfee went back to the station because he was feeling worse. Tests indicated that Deputy Fire Chief Durfee was experiencing a cardiovascular event, and he was transported to a local hospital. While at the hospital, he went into cardiac arrest. Medical personnel were able to revive Deputy Fire Chief Durfee, but despite these efforts, he passed away on March 2.

**WILLIAM CORY PRICE** On April 19, Firefighter/Paramedic William Cory Price, 56, Ford County Fire and EMS, Dodge City, KS, suffered a medical emergency while on duty. Firefighter/Paramedic Price was transported to a local hospital and later transported to a higher-level care hospital where, despite all efforts, he was pronounced deceased. The cause of death has yet to be determined.

**TODD B. PENDLETON** On March 20, Firefighter Todd Pendleton, 62, Goldsby Volunteer Fire Department, Goldsby, OK, was responding to a structure fire as a passenger in a tanker truck carrying 3,000 gallons of water. While in route, the vehicle went off the roadway to the right. It then re-entered the roadway, crossed to the left, struck a tree, rolled over, and struck two more trees before coming to a rest. Firefighter Pendleton suffered fatal injuries and was pronounced deceased at the scene of the accident. Another firefighter with the Goldsby Volunteer Fire Department who was driving the vehicle, Firefighter Bryan Jenkins, also suffered fatal injuries and was pronounced deceased at the scene.

**CHRISTOPHER JOHN DORSEY** On March 23, Chief Christopher Dorsey, 45, Reems Creek Fire Department, Weaverville, NC, went home after completing a 24-hour shift which included a search and rescue call that concluded at 2:50 p.m. The following day, Chief Dorsey did not report for his shift that started at 6:30 a.m. Chief Dorsey's son went to check on him at his home and found him unresponsive. Despite having received lifesaving measures, Chief Dorsey was pronounced deceased at his home at approximately 7:30 a.m.

**RUSSELL "RUSTY" SHOULTZ** On April 30, 2026, Fire Chief Russell "Rusty" Shultz, 52, Walker MI Fire Department, participated in fire department aerial operations training which ended at approximately 4:30 p.m. Early the next morning and within 24 hours of the training, Fire Chief Shultz suffered a cardiovascular event at his home. He was transported to a local hospital where, despite all efforts, he was pronounced deceased.

**AARON L. WESCOTT** Fire Inspector Aaron Wescott, 50, Altus Air Force Base Fire and Emergency Services, Altus Air Force Base, OK, was working a 24-hour shift and responded to a medical emergency around 1:03 a.m. on Feb 15. Fire Inspector Wescott returned from the call and went back to his sleeping quarters. When he did not show up for roll call, fellow crew members checked on Fire Inspector Wescott in his dormitory room and found him unresponsive. Although lifesaving measures were performed, Fire Inspector Wescott was pronounced deceased at the station from a cardiovascular event.

**STEPHEN REEVES** On March 2, 2026, Firefighter/Paramedic Stephen Reeves, 54, Henry County Fire Rescue, McDonough, GA, was found unresponsive at the fire station while working a 24-hour shift. Fellow crew members administered advanced lifesaving measures to Firefighter/Paramedic Reeves and transported him to a local hospital. Firefighter/Paramedic Reeves spent two days in the hospital's intensive care unit before passing away on March 4, 2026. The cause of death was determined to be a cardiovascular event.

**NEIL SCHNAIBLE** On April 29, 2026, during promotional testing while on duty, Fire Engineer Neil Schnaible, 55, Lake Valley Fire Protection District, South Lake Tahoe, CA, suffered a cardiovascular event, fell, and struck his head. Fire Engineer Schnaible was transported to a local medical center for treatment of the cardiovascular event. While there, it was discovered that Fire Engineer Schnaible suffered multiple severe brain bleeds. He was then transported to an out-of-state medical center where, despite all efforts, he was pronounced deceased on May 4.

**ROBERT R. SHICK, JR.** On April 4, while searching for a missing person, Assistant Fire Chief Robert Shick Jr., 56, Walnuttown Fire and Rescue, Fleetwood, PA, along with Fire Chief Jeffery Buck, were in a Utility Task Vehicle (UTV) traveling south on the shoulder of a roadway. As another vehicle that was also traveling south approached the UTV, it went off the roadway and struck the UTV. Assistant Chief Shick was transported to a local hospital where he was pronounced deceased from the fatal injuries sustained in the accident. Fire Chief Buck was also transported to a local hospital where he was pronounced deceased.

**JAMES KEVIN CREWS** On April 23, Firefighter James Kevin Crews, 60, Hilliard (FL) Volunteer Fire Department, experienced a medical emergency while fighting a brushfire. Fellow responders administered lifesaving measures and transported Firefighter Crews to a local hospital where he was pronounced deceased. The cause of death has not been determined.

**ELTON RAY JACOBS, SR.** On March 14, Administrative Chief Elton Ray Jacobs Sr., 72, Bolton (NC) Volunteer Fire Department and Rescue Squad, responded to several emergency calls. The last call he made was a medical incident. On March 15, and within 24 hours of responding to the medical incident, Administrative Chief Jacobs suffered a cardiovascular event at home. Emergency personnel responded to the home and administered lifesaving measures to Administrative Chief Jacobs and subsequently transported him to a local hospital. Despite these efforts, Administrative Chief Jacobs was pronounced deceased at the hospital.

**ANDREW CROSS** At 10:05 a.m. on May 15, Firefighter Andrew Cross, 27, responded with the Morrill (MA) Volunteer Fire Department to a fire in a wood chip silo at a lumber mill. While firefighters were working to contain the fire, an explosion occurred. Later that day around 7 p.m., Firefighter Cross was found at the scene and pronounced deceased from the fatal injuries he suffered during the explosion.

**THOMAS KELLY** On February 26, 1992, Firefighter Thomas Kelly, New Haven (CT) Fire Department, fell through a shaft and down about 30 feet while conducting roof operations at a commercial building fire. Firefighter Kelly suffered catastrophic injuries including a head injury. On May 4, 2026, Firefighter Kelly passed away from the injuries he sustained in the fall during the 1992 incident.

**MICHAEL E. ALTMAN** On March 16, at the scene of a four-story apartment building fire, Firefighter/EMT Michael Altman, 32, Chicago Fire Department, was searching the structure when he fell from the collapsed first floor into the basement and suffered burns to approximately 90% of his body. Firefighter/EMT Altman was rescued and transported to a hospital where he passed away the following morning. One person has been charged with murder and aggravated arson in connection with the fire. Firefighter/EMT Altman was a fourth-generation Chicago Fire Department member.

**STEVEN M. DECKER** On May 14, engineer Steven Decker, 61, Chicago Fire Department, suffered a medical emergency during an annual equipment (hose) test. Engineer Decker was treated and transported to a local hospital where he later passed away. The cause of death has yet to be determined.

**CARL "LEVI" EVANS** On April 8, Assistant Fire Chief Carl "Levi" Evans, 42, Greeley County (KS) Fire and Rescue, suffered a medical emergency during fire department training. Assistant Fire Chief Evans was transported to a local hospital where he passed away early the following morning. The cause of death has yet to be determined.

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# SDFA OFFICER REPORTS



Charlie Kludt, President

"The State Firefighter Assistance grant information was sent out to all departments in early May. The \$5 million grant funding application period runs until August 1st. Check your department mail, email, or go to the State Fire Marshal office website for information and application details."

## Making Plans

State Fire School registration numbers are looking promising. We have several classes filled and many with limited spots left. We also have courses that are only limited to the size of the room we have available. Check the SDFA website to register.

I have submitted my intent to run for SDFA President to the

nominations committee. I am looking forward to serving another 3-year term for the fire service of South Dakota.

The addition of Taylor Moore and the association management staff to assist with SDFA daily operations, membership needs and requests, accounting, and registrations has been transitioning well. The SDFA board is still coming to terms with the level of assistance



NVFC Spring Conference attendees: Craig Johnson, Custer, Dan Hodge, North Haines, Charlie Kludt, Viborg



the office is providing. Their experience and capabilities are making for efficient response and updates that the board members were trying to complete on evenings and spare time. If you needed assistance with registration and logins, you probably have talked to their office.

The State Firefighter Assistance grant information was sent out to all departments in early May. The \$5 million grant funding application period runs until August 1st. Check your department mail, email, or go to the State Fire Marshal office website for information and application details.

Our NVFC delegation was in Washington DC in May for the spring conference. Dan Hodge, Craig Johnson and I attended the 3-day conference as we celebrate the 50th year of the NVFC. I will have a full report in the July newsletter.

We visited with our congressional offices about the local issues and national items of interest to volunteer fire departments. The proposed increase to the AFG and SAFER grants was a highlight. The possibility of a fire station construction grant was sounding promising, but it would be 1-time money, if approved. Recommendations for ongoing rural development funds for other possible assistance was suggested for construction projects.

We heard reports from underwriters laboratory (UL) testing on lithium-ion batteries, storage systems, and vehicles. Ironically, many recent theories and tactical ideas for cooling or stopping thermal runaway were dispelled under

common emergency conditions. I recommend checking UL test findings for more information.

One of the largest alternative energy companies in the world presented training opportunities for departments that serve the areas they have solar, wind, compressed gases, and energy storage facilities in operation. Emphasizing that any company or owner with any of these type of systems need to provide training to local emergency departments on the proper response to these components. What to do and what not to do.

The NVFC provides many free online and in person training opportunities. Whether individually, department, district or state school, check their list of courses on the NVFC training website.

You may have seen the devastating explosion that happened at the lumber mill in Maine at couple of weeks ago. While at NVFC, fellow state director from Maine reported the incident to the group as it happened. He was a personal friend of the lost firefighter, his family, and many of those injured.

It was an unfortunate instance of unexpected circumstances at what seemed to be heavy fire load at an outdoor lumber facility. As we all sympathize with the family and department members, they reminded us all to never underestimate what can happen.

I look forward to see the hundreds of you at State Fire School in Watertown.

Happy Fathers' Day, and stay safe.

CHARLIE KLUDT  
SDFA President



Dave Jorgenson,  
Southeast Director

"Fire school is around the corner; classes have filled up fast. Get ready for another great school, some new classes, some repeats that always fill up, some basic classes and advanced classes."

Fire school is around the corner; classes have filled up fast. Get ready for another great school, some new classes, some repeats that always fill up, some basic classes and advanced classes.

Come learn some new stuff, see old friends and have some fun. At this time my only paper nomination I have received for President is Charlie Kludt.

DAVE JORGENSEN  
SESD director



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!

# SDFA OFFICER REPORTS

## FIRE SCHOOL 2026 PREVIEW

Fire school is a few weeks away as I write this and numbers are looking strong. We currently have about 75 more people registered than at this time last year. We are hoping the momentum continues.

A common question I get is why do we keep offering the same classes year after year. Well, quite simply, they fill up. In a perfect world some of the classes offered at the state level would be done on a local level, but they are not. This being a state fire school we must accommodate all levels of experience and ability. Our goal is to

bring people together and enhance their ability no matter the experience level.

This year we are offering nine new classes or classes that have new content so there is something for anyone, even if you have attended State Fire School in the past. On a recent Fire Engineering podcast, the topic of discussion was how FDIC was put together and how they decide what classes to offer. Their formula was one-third return classes, one-third return instructors with new content, and one-third new instructors with new topics. This is an interesting idea and something the board will discuss.

Our lineup this year includes some of the nation's leading subject

experts. **Christopher Naum** created the Residential Building Construction walking tour class specifically for Watertown, SD. This has never been done anywhere else yet. Christopher has taught across the nation and FDIC. He brings unsurpassed knowledge and experience to South Dakota. **Jerry Knapp** is another FDIC speaker, and we have worked closely with Jerry to customize his class to fit our needs. **Brandon Fletcher** is bringing his signature "Shaping Your Volunteer Fire Department to Meet Today's Expectation" class this year. This class has been done at The Firehouse Expo multiple times as well as across the country. **Mark Davis** has modified his 16-hour hands



**Rick George,**  
Central District Director

"Christopher Naum created the Residential Building Construction walking tour class specifically for Watertown, SD. This has never been done anywhere else yet. Christopher has taught across the nation and FDIC. He brings unsurpassed knowledge and experience to South Dakota."

on Rural Water Supply Class to fit into an 8-hour spot. Mark has instructed across North America and brings a wealth of knowledge and experience. Add in South Dakota Rock stars like the **FOOLS** groups, **Calen Maningas, Jake Jorgenson** and all the other favorites and we have quite a line up this year.

I look forward to seeing all

the students and instructors next month in Watertown, June 11-13, at what is my Superbowl for firefighters. This is what I wait for every year and feel honored and humbled to be a small part of it.

See you soon!

**RICK GEORGE,**  
Central District Director

## Thoughts From the Tailboard

It's here. State Fire School is here. As you read this month's *South Dakota Firefighters* newsletter it will be happening. Ok, I'll admit the newsletter is generally out the first couple of days of the month, and fire school won't be until the second weekend, but no matter. It's here. What a time to share experiences with hundreds of other firefighters from around the state. Learn something new. Go and when you get home start doing something that you learned at fire school. Fire school has so much to offer, I certainly hope you take advantage of everything there is. Don't miss this opportunity. I had been fortunate to spend a few weeks in Florida in late April and early May. As I traveled around, I notice a number of the newer apartment buildings and commercial buildings have a red and white sign with the fire department Maltese cross with either a large

red "R" or "F." I understand it signifies that either the roof or floor structure maybe unstable during a fire. I wonder if any fire departments in our state are using this? Just curious.

It's June!!! Why is that important? What were you doing in June 1976? I know some of you will say, "I wasn't even born." For me it was the start of my 50 years in the fire service. A guy working for me, decided to form the North Hanes VFD. Volunteer firefighter? I could barely spell the name let alone know what firefighters do. I didn't know an SCBA from anything else. None of the original members are still there, I'm the last one. None of us had any firefighting experience. We all learned together. When I'm working with a new firefighter I try to remember that all those years ago I didn't know any of this either. But we learned slowly, bit by bit. Too many times, I see instructors who forget at one point in their life, they didn't know anything about fire-

fighting when they started. We all need to have some patience sometimes and step back and remember. I wouldn't trade the past 50 years of involvement in the fire service for anything. If you are a 50+ year firefighter, please drop me an email and just say "I'm one". My email is [dgortonfire@gmail.com](mailto:dgortonfire@gmail.com)

I have been on the SD Firefighters Association Board for over 30 years. I know what you're thinking. He should have left a long time ago. I tried; believe me I tried. After our Treasurer Paul Smith passed away suddenly in 2014 I took over those duties. Charlie Kludt became President. The SDFA Board has contracted with Advanced Association Management (AAM) to manage the coordination of instructors and many other duties. One of those is the treasurer's position. So just to let everyone know, after this year's fire school, it will be my last one as a board member. I will miss it a whole lot no question. I will miss the interaction, the stress of



**Denny Gorton,**  
Retired Treasurer/Past President

"I have been on the SD Firefighters Association Board for over 30 years. I know what you're thinking. He should have left a long time ago. I tried; believe me I tried."

getting fire school ready and who knows what else. However, for the first time in 30 years, I will have time to actually take a class. Yep, I'm signed up for one. I'll be working with Taylor and their staff from AAM to take over these duties. I won't abandon anyone. If you have a question, call. If you send me something I'll get it to the correct people. I have too much love for the fire service of South Dakota and you to simply go away. As they say it is bittersweet. I have cherished your friendship,

your support of the SD Firefighters Association, the Lifetime Membership in the South Dakota Firefighters Association, working with our great instructors, Jeff from the newsletter and everything else. I'll still continue to write Thoughts From the Tailboard, just from a slightly different angle.

With all this I'll sign off for this month. Remember learn something new each day and pass it on.

**DENNY GORTON**

# SDFA AUXILIARY REPORT

## South Dakota State Fire Auxiliary Announces Events for Upcoming Fire School

The South Dakota State Fire Auxiliary is preparing to welcome members and attendees to this year's highly anticipated fire school, featuring a mix of educational opportunities, meaningful connection, and community-building events.

Auxiliary activities will begin Friday with an "Eat and Greet" scheduled for 11 a.m., offering attendees a chance to connect, network, and kick off the weekend in a relaxed setting. At 1 p.m., a special guest speaker, Shawn, will share a powerful and personal presentation about how the loss of her husband in the line of duty has shaped her perspective. Her story is expected to bring insight,

reflection, and inspiration to those in attendance.

Friday evening will continue with a "Swim and Social" at the hotel, giving members an opportunity to unwind and strengthen connections outside of the classroom setting.

Events will continue into Saturday, highlighted by a live drawing at 1 p.m., adding an element of excitement and engagement for participants.

Attendees are reminded that all auxiliary events are subject to change depending on fire school activities, including water fights and training evolutions.

The South Dakota State Fire Auxiliary looks forward to supporting firefighters and their families while fostering camaraderie and providing meaningful experiences throughout the weekend.

**JAMIE RELHAK**  
SDFF Auxiliary



On May 15, the Battle Creek Fire Department responded to a reported structure fire in the 13000 block of Lost Cave Rd, rural Keystone, Unincorporated Pennington County. First arriving firefighters found a free burning fire with a heavy smoke condition, issuing from the interior of a single story, residential structure with fire extending into the ceiling and roof assembly. Additionally, fire extended to adjacent trees, vegetation, agriculture shelters, causing smoke, heat and fire damage.



# South Dakota State Fire School 2026 Schedule



Most events will be at the Lake Area Technical College (LATC), 1201 Arrow Avenue

*\*schedule may be subject to change; be aware of updates\**

## Thursday, June 11th

- 9:00 Tradeshow set-up – *LATC Student Services Center (SSC)*
  - 3:00 Registration & Vendor Show open
  - 5:30 Registration & Vendor Show closes
  - 5:30 Instructor Meeting – *LATC (Location TBA)*
  - 6:00 Watertown Thursday Night Live Events – *Downtown  
3<sup>rd</sup> St SE, E Kemp Ave intersection*
- Dinner on your own

## Friday, June 12th

- 7:00 Registration Opens – *LATC*
  - 7:30 Opening Remarks & Membership Meeting** – *LATC SSC Events Center*
  - 8:00 Tradeshow Opens
  - 8:30 Classes begin After
  - 11:30 Lunch – (schedule may vary by class) – food on-site – *SSC Commons*
  - 1:00 Classes Resume after lunch
  - 5:00 Registration and Tradeshow Closes
  - 5:30 Firefighters Memorial Service** – *LATC Events Center*
- Dinner on your own

## Saturday, June 13th

- 7:30 Registration & Vendor Show Opens
- 8:30 Classes Begin After
- 11:00 Election Polls Open
- 11:30 Dinner – (schedule may vary by class) – food on-site – *SSC Commons*
- 12:00 Tradeshow closes
- 1:00 Classes resume after dinner
- 2:00 Election polls close

**Upon completion of last class – Closing Ceremonies / Membership meeting / Awards**

*LATC Events Center (approx. 4:30pm )*



General Fund 2025 Inc/Exp - Last year  
1/1/2025 through 12/31/2025

Category	1/1/2025-12/31/2025	OVERALL TOTAL
<b>INCOME</b>		
DOT Income	230	230
Fall Conference Income	1,423	1,423
Fallen Fighters Memorial	0	0
Grants	300	300
INTEREST	2,162	2,162
MEMBERSHIP-MEMBERSHIP INCOME	158,315	158,315
State Fire School	16,414	16,414
FROM REG FUND SAVINGS 1056040 A	9,810	9,810
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>188,654</b>	<b>188,654</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
Advanced Association Management	932	932
Board Travel Expenses	3,174	3,174
Contract	8,800	8,800
Fall Conference Expense	5,326	5,326
FALLEN FIREFIGHTER MEMORIAL-E...	311	311
INSURANCE-INSURANCE (ROBOT, B...	111,219	111,219
Membership Drive	568	568
Membership Software	12,717	12,717
NEWSLETTER	24,000	24,000
NVFC-NVFC EXPENSES FOR 1 MTG.	11,411	11,411
OFFICE EXPENSE	1,978	1,978
Scholarship	5,000	5,000
SD FIRE SCHOOL-FIRESCHOOL EXP...	19,661	19,661
SD Joint Council	869	869
SDFA BOARD EXP-SDFA BOARD EX...	1,096	1,096
TO GF CHECKING DSFCU 1038930 7	9,810	9,810
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>216,870</b>	<b>216,870</b>
<b>OVERALL TOTAL</b>	<b>-28,217</b>	<b>-28,217</b>



**Woonsocket called to farm vehicle fire**

Woonsocket Fire Department responded to a farm vehicle fire on April 20. With the initial information from dispatch being the vehicle was near a barn and near red flag conditions Alpena Fire Department was immediately requested for mutual aid.

Net Worth 2025 YTD - As of 12/31/2025  
(Includes unrealized gains)

Account	12/31/2025 Balance
<b>ASSETS</b>	
<b>Cash and Bank Accounts</b>	
Gen Fund 6 Month CD 1038930-3-22-2026	40,028.13
GEN FUND SCHOLARSHIP CD1027050D 10-7-27-Matures 10/7/27, 1.8...	39,724.54
GENL FUND MONEY MARKET DSFCU103890M-Dues Interest Bearing ...	3.38
GF CHECKING DSFCU 1038930 7	8,719.11
GF Sav DSFCU 1038930 A	5.06
MEMORIAL FUND SAVINGS DSFCU 1027050 A-Membership Acct.	4,752.21
REG FUND SAVINGS 1056040 A	16,044.32
STATE FUND CHECKING DSFCU 1039100 7	595.42
STATE FUND MONEY MARKET DSFCU 1039100 M	343,635.01
STATE FUND MEMB ACCT SAV DSFCU 1039100 A	5.08
<b>TOTAL Cash and Bank Accounts</b>	<b>453,512.26</b>
<b>Other Assets</b>	
<b>TOTAL Other Assets</b>	<b>0.00</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>453,512.26</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>	
<b>Credit Cards</b>	
<b>TOTAL Credit Cards</b>	<b>0.00</b>
<b>Other Liabilities</b>	
<b>TOTAL Other Liabilities</b>	<b>0.00</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>0.00</b>
<b>OVERALL TOTAL</b>	<b>453,512.26</b>

State Fund 2025 Inc Exp - Last year  
1/1/2025 through 12/31/2025

Category	1/1/2025-12/31/2025	OVERALL TOTAL
<b>INCOME</b>		
District Fire School Income	-466	-466
INTEREST	1,378	1,378
State Fire School	-5,460	-5,460
State Fund Budget	246,865	246,865
FROM STATE FUND MONEY MARKE...	133,259	133,259
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>375,575</b>	<b>375,575</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
Board Travel Expenses	6,047	6,047
District Fire Schools-DISTRICT FIRES...	13,688	13,688
Fall Conference Expense	13,698	13,698
Mobile Fire Trailer #1 - Expense	8,550	8,550
Mobile Fire Trailer #2 - Expense	926	926
OFFICE EXPENSE	52	52
SD FIRE SCHOOL-FIRESCHOOL EXP...	85,876	85,876
VOIDED	0	0
TO STATE FUND CHECKING DSFCU ...	133,259	133,259
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>262,096</b>	<b>262,096</b>
<b>OVERALL TOTAL</b>	<b>113,479</b>	<b>113,479</b>

# South East District Fire School Draws Strong Turnout in Volga

Firefighters from across the region gathered in Volga this past weekend for the annual South East District Fire School, an event that continues to grow in both size and impact. Hosted at the Sioux Valley

School in Volga and surrounding training locations, this year's school saw one of its highest attendance numbers in decades, with approximately 70 firefighters participating in the day-long training.

The event, built by firefighters for firefighters, focused on providing hands-on, real-world training designed to strengthen skills, improve response capabilities, and enhance safety on the fireground.

Participants had the opportunity to choose from a wide variety of classes tailored to today's emergency response challenges. Course offerings included Wildland Fire Tactical Considerations, Firefighter Vehicle Extrication, Structural Collapse Awareness, Trench Collapse Awareness, and Confined Space Operations. Additional sessions focused on patient handling during farming accidents and medical emergencies, as well as a presentation from the South Dakota Fire Marshal's Office covering fire reporting, investigations, and current industry topics. Instructors brought decades of experience to the classroom and training grounds, offering both lecture-based learning and hands-on scenarios that allowed firefighters to apply techniques in realistic environments. From extrication drills to simulated collapse scenarios, the training emphasized teamwork, decision-making, and situational awareness.

Participants had the opportunity to choose from a wide variety of classes tailored to today's emergency response challenges.

“This is exactly what the fire service is about — showing up, putting in the work, and getting better for the communities we serve,” SE District Board Member said. “To see this many firefighters come together, learn from each other, and push themselves is something we're really proud of.”

The event also fostered camaraderie among departments, giving firefighters the opportunity to connect, share experiences, and build relationships across district lines.

With attendance numbers climbing and feedback from participants overwhelmingly positive, organizers are already looking ahead to next year's Fire School hosted by the North Sioux City Fire Department, with plans to expand class offerings and continue delivering high-quality, relevant training.

To learn more about what's going on in the South East District Fire visit their website at [sdsoutheast-district.com](http://sdsoutheast-district.com).

Organizers noted that the strong turnout reflects a growing commit-





## Southeast District Fire School

The Southeast District Firefighters Association hosted their spring fire school in Volga on Saturday, April 25. Even with the cool weather and rain, the training remained a great experience for the firefighters. Attendees participated in a variety of hands-on classes including auto extrication, confined space work, wild-land fire and structural collapse.

## American Red Cross names Rapid City's Richard Felix new Executive Director

Experienced nonprofit professional and U.S. Air Force veteran will lead the chapter serving Central and Western South Dakota

By **CARRIE CARLSON**, Guest American Red Cross Minnesota and Dakotas Region

The American Red Cross Minnesota and Dakotas Region has named Richard Felix as Executive Director serving Central and Western South Dakota.

Felix brings more than a decade of leadership experience across nonprofit, military and public safety sectors, along with a deep understanding of the Red Cross mission and the communities it serves.

"Richard leads with a steady, mission-first approach and a genuine commitment to people," said Brice Johnson, regional chief executive officer for the American Red Cross Minnesota and Dakotas Region. "He has already been a trusted leader for staff, volunteers and partners across the region, and his experience building strong relationships and guiding teams through complex environments will continue to strengthen our work across Central and Western South Dakota."

Felix most recently served as a Regional Program Manager with the American Red Cross Minnesota and Dakotas Region, helping guide Service to the Armed Forces and International Services programs across three states. Since February 2026, he has also served as Interim Executive Director for the chapter, providing steady leadership and supporting staff and volunteers across the region. Prior to joining the Red Cross, Felix served nine years in the United

States Air Force, where he led personnel and managed global logistics and operations in support of national security missions.

"I'm honored to continue serving alongside the volunteers, staff and partners who make this mission possible every day," Felix said. "The people across Central and Western South Dakota care deeply about their communities, and I'm excited to keep building relationships and supporting the work happening across the region."

Felix holds a Bachelor of Science in Homeland Security from University of Maryland Global Campus and is currently pursuing a Master of Business Administration. He and his wife, Elisabeth Cave, live in Rapid City, where he stays actively involved through board service, veteran support initiatives, youth soccer and volunteer leadership.

### ABOUT THE AMERICAN RED CROSS

The American Red Cross shelters, feeds and provides emotional support to people impacted by disasters; supplies about 40% of the nation's blood; teaches skills that save lives; provides international humanitarian aid; and supports members of the military, veterans and their families.

The American Red Cross serving Central and Western South Dakota supports communities across Aurora, Bennett, Brule, Buffalo, Butte, Campbell, Charles Mix, Corson, Custer, Dewey, Douglas, Edmunds, Fall River, Faulk, Gregory, Haakon, Hand, Harding, Hughes, Hyde, Jackson, Jerauld, Jones, Lawrence, Lyman, McPherson, Meade, Mellette, Pennington, Perkins, Potter, Stanley, Sully, Todd, Tripp, Waltham and Ziebach counties, as well as seven sovereign Tribal Nations. Learn more at [RedCross.org/MNDAKS](https://www.RedCross.org/MNDAKS) and follow us on social media.



140th Annual  
**SD State Fire School**  
June 11-13, 2026

**ONLINE REGISTRATION**  
**NOW OPEN**

Visit <https://www.sdfirefighters.org>  
and go to [events page](#)

<https://members.sdfirefighters.org/event-calendar/Details/sd-state-fire-school-2026-140th-annual-1422541?sourceTypeId=Website>

*Class list and schedule also available*



## New Underwood residential structure fire

On May 10, New Underwood Volunteer Fire Department, responded to a reported fire in a residential structure, in the 200 Block of South A Avenue New Underwood. First arriving New Underwood Volunteer firefighters found a fire and smoke condition, in the walls and roof assembly of a residential structure. Firefighters successfully contained the fire to the structure of origin protecting adjacent structures, infrastructure and other improvements. No injuries to firefighters, civilians or domestic animals were reported. The Red Cross serving Central and Western South Dakota is assisting the occupants. Agencies responding: Pennington County 911, New Underwood Volunteer Fire Department, United States Air force 28<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing/Ellsworth Air Force Base Fire Department, Box Elder Volunteer Fire Department, Rapid Valley Volunteer Fire Department, Pennington County Sheriff's Office, Rapid City Fire Department Ambulance Service, West River Electrical Cooperative, New Underwood Public Works, neighbors and the Red Cross Serving Central and Western South Dakota. Photo courtesy of the New Underwood Volunteer Fire Department.

## 2026 South Dakota State Fire School – Watertown SD Evolution Registration Form

Please Print

Fire Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Evolution Team: \_\_\_\_\_ 3 person \_\_\_\_\_ 3 person Auxiliary

TEAM CAPTAIN: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Yrs of Service: \_\_\_\_\_

Team Member: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Yrs of Service: \_\_\_\_\_

Team Member: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Yrs of Service: \_\_\_\_\_

Team Member: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Yrs of Service: \_\_\_\_\_

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Team Member: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Yrs of Service: \_\_\_\_\_

Evolution Insurance Policy: To participate in any evolution event at State Fire School, the participating department or person MUST submit proof of insurance. This insurance may be workman's compensation; declaration page; personal insurance card, or other that will provide coverage for the participant(s) in the event of an injury to the participant. NO ONE will be allowed to compete in the evolutions until this proof of insurance is provided. Proof of insurance and team entry form: Just bring entry form; entry fee and proof of insurance with you when you enter at the Team Captains meeting. Also, please give a courtesy email to the below email addresses so that we have an idea you are entering & for corresponding with. \*\*Teams may enter up until the Team Captains meeting prior to evolutions, as long as last minute teams can provide proof of insurance and pay all entry fees. All new & existing teams are welcome!

Any competing department and team member must be on a South Dakota fire department/auxiliary & be members of the SDFA (or state auxiliary); be a member or retired member of a South Dakota fire department, and must pay a team entry fee. Entry fee is \$50 per team. (If your department has more than one team, a separate entry fee must be included from each team, and members cannot be on both teams.) Only South Dakota departments may participate in the evolutions. Please make checks to SDFA and bring to the Team Captains meeting prior to the evolutions. ABSOLUTELY NO REFUNDS!! All team members must be at least 18 yrs of age and be a member of a fire department (not junior or cadet); auxiliary or a retired member of an SD department. Any new team that hasn't participated in the evolutions in the past will have their entry fee waived. Evolution date is Thursday, June 11th around the same time/and/or following & location of the water fights – on Kemp near 3rd Street SE.

Evolutions will be run as illustrated in the current evolutions rule book. A copy can be emailed to your team if you let us know – Rick Cronin of Fort Pierre Fire – cell 605-280-3185 or email: [fpfireman1@hotmail.com](mailto:fpfireman1@hotmail.com) or Larry Nickles – Retired Yankton Fire – cell: 605-661-2785 or email: [merc.harley@yahoo.com](mailto:merc.harley@yahoo.com).

At LEAST 2 members from each team are required to help set up & tear down. Team Captains meeting will be TBD at around 6:00 pm on site. Start time: TBD – most likely immediately following the water fights.

## One person seriously injured in Moody County house fire

One person has been seriously injured in a house fire that occurred Monday night in Moody County.

Around 11 p.m., emergency crews were dispatched to a report of a house fire in Egan.

When first responders got there, they found flames coming from the house.

There were three occupants inside along with a dog.

Two victims suffered minor injuries and one victim had serious injuries.

The dog did not survive the fire.

Fire departments from Flandreau, Colman fire department and Trent responded. Fire crews remained on scene for about six and a half hours. The cause of the fire is under investigation.

# FLASHOVER

## RAPID FIRE DEVELOPMENT

By **JERRY KNAPP**  
[jknapp23@aol.com](mailto:jknapp23@aol.com)  
 845-558-0489

Flashover is a fire dynamic we need to understand and should be aware of at every structure fire we go to. But what really is flashover? What triggers it? What are the effects? How does the fire instantly morph from the contents to floor to ceiling flames filling the room at around 2,000F and burning firefighters alive? We can argue the fine points of flashover or back-draft but the definition I like to use is simple: rapid fire development. Here are some of the facts that are important for every firefighter and fire officer to take with you to your next fire.

In 1996 our County Fire Coordinator Gordon Wren had the foresight to purchase a flashover training unit from Swede Survival from which we learned a lot about fire dynamics before the term was made popular by Fire Safety Research Institute a part of UL. Before our first burn to train instructors, Gordon explained to us how it worked. First we line the shipping container with chip board, light a crib fire to involve the chip board, get inside, close the door and wait for the flashover our heads. At the time, we were not sold on his plan but it proved to be excellent way to observe flashover from 3' below floor level.

Lets use the example of a house fire. The amount of air the fire has access to controls the speed of fire development. The fire is ventilation limited, lots of fuel not enough air.

Those are the conditions until we force the door, chock it open and/or take windows before water is on the fire. So the fire has all the fuel it needs but is starving

for air/oxygen. More air more fire, very quickly. While searching, you need to consider where this fire is on the fire curve (see FSRI) to figure how much time you have before it gets untenable.

Flashover warning signs to look for while searching or pushing a hose line in include: high heat, free burning fire, dense smoke and a late sign....rollover. But these are conditions that we face in every fire. So yes, expect a flashover and keep an eye on conditions and warning signs. If you don't have a hose line, and see the conditions get out now. If you have the nozzle, open it, right now. The key factor in terms of our survival is to get water on the fire quickly, from where ever you can....inside or outside thru a window or door: water kills flashover. Delay ventilation until water is on or very close to being applied.

So where does all this instant fire come from? The fire is producing flammable gases as a result of pyrolysis of fuels in the room. Fuels (furniture, beds, drapes, rugs, etc) are heated by the fire and are broken down into flammable, not yet burning gases. In a world class article in Fire Engineering Magazine (Dec 2025) Tim Crockett from Louisiana Fire and Emergency Training Academy describes these as chemical time bombs in the volatile smoke. Dave Walsh a NYS Fire Instructor magnificently summarizes this complex chemical process as: smoke is fuel. Remember that, Dave has captured it so you can take it to every fire.

According to Crockett, some of the flammable gases include: car-

bon monoxide, hydrogen cyanide, acrolein, benzene, toluene, styrene, xylene and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. OK more chemistry than we need to know but we need to recall that these are flammable.

What I could never understand was how does flashover fill the room with fire? Why does it not bank down from the top and stay higher in the room if that is where the flammable smoke is? Crockett included the fact that most of these gases are heavier than air so when they ignite they maybe lower in the smoke column than we would expect. Sure some lighter than air flammable gases are lighting up near the ceiling but these other bad guys, if they are not driven up by heat will light up closer to us near the floor. Think back to the flashover simulator, trainees are three feet below the fire module which is filled with flames floor to ceiling. In the real world we are on the fire floor and cant dig a fox hole to survive.

What about rollover? Why is it so slow and lazy? One of the reasons is the carbon dioxide in the smoke slows the process. But, at around 1100F the CO2 breaks down into flammable CO and this maybe what is helping drive the change from slow lazy fire to roaring flashover. Lots of other factors in play but this gives you an idea of the role of smoke as fuel.

So a couple important take-aways:

Structure fires are usually ventilation limited, more air = more fire



Coordinate ventilation with application of water from either inside or out

Caution!!! Use modern nozzle techniques if applying water from outside (See FSRI Fire Attack Study)

Especially during search, monitor conditions

Review the Cherry Road fire report ( double LODD in 1999)

Go to FSRI.ORG for world class fire dynamics explanations/training.

## IPSWICH VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT RESPONDS TO GRASS FIRE MONDAY

The Ipswich Volunteer Fire Department responded to a grass fire near the elevator at Craven on Monday May 11. According to fire officials, the cause of the fire was a passing freight train, which kicked sparks igniting dry grass. Much of South Dakota is experiencing low moisture and low humidity which can create fire hazard conditions. Flames in this case were contained by firefighters in less than 20 minutes. No one was injured and no property damage was reported.



### Garage lost in Box Elder fire

On May 3, the Box Elder Volunteer Fire Department responded to a report of fire and smoke visible from a detached garage in the 4900 block of South Sunnyside Dr rural Box Elder. First arriving firefighters found a free burning fire with a heavy smoke condition, issuing from the single story, detached structure with fire extending into the ceiling, roof assembly and adjacent grass. Rapid attack by firefighters contained the fire to the structure of origin, stopping the spread of the flames to nearby structures, infrastructure and other improvements, approximately 1/4 acre of grass was also burned. No injuries to firefighters, civilians or domestic animals were reported. Agencies responding: Pennington County 911, Box Elder Volunteer Fire Department, Pennington County Sheriff's Office, United States Air force 28<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing/Elsworth Air Force Base Fire Department, Whispering Pines Volunteer Fire Department, Rapid Valley Volunteer Fire Department, the Rapid City Fire Department and Ambulance Service, North Haines Volunteer Fire Department and Pennington County Sheriff's office. Photo courtesy of the Box Elder Volunteer Fire Department.

# Gov. Rhoden Activates State Drought Task Force



Governor Larry Rhoden has activated the state Drought Task Force to monitor drought conditions across South Dakota. The task force first meeting was held on Thursday, May 7.

The latest U.S. Drought Monitor shows moderate to extreme drought present throughout the lower third of South Dakota with abnormally dry conditions across central parts of the state. Counties in northern South Dakota remain under normal conditions.

“My administration is committed to protecting our farmers, ranchers, and communities across the state. While recent rainfall has provided some relief, drought is still impacting parts of South Dakota,” said Governor Larry Rhoden. “The Drought Task Force will help us closely monitor conditions and respond quickly if needed.”

The Drought Task Force coordinates the exchange of drought-related information among government agencies and partners to assess potential impacts on agri-

culture, fire management, and water-supplies. Through this collaboration, the Task Force can more effectively monitor drought conditions, assess drought severity, evaluate impacts, and review available drought-response resources.

State agencies represented on the Drought Task Force include the Governor’s Office, Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Department of Public Safety, Department of Game, Fish and Parks, South Dakota National Guard, Department of Social Services, Department of Tourism, and the Department of Tribal Relations. Additional partners include USDA’s Farm Service Agency and Natural Resource Conservation Service, South Dakota State University Extension and School of Mines climatologists, the National Weather Service, and South Dakota Rural Water.

Because of the dry conditions, the public is urged to use caution with open burns and other activities that could start fires.



## Aerial water delivery training

SD Wildland Fire and SD Army National Guard held aerial water delivery recertification training Friday, May 1. Black Hawk helicopter personnel practiced water drops on ground targets simulating a wildfire. The annual joint training also provides live experience for interagency ground personnel and helps keep South Dakota safe.

## Box Elder training day


In late April, Box Elder Volunteer Fire Department took advantage of the warm weather and trained on hose advancement into a structure, search and rescue, and nozzle knowledge. In addition, Firefighter testing was hosted by Johnson Siding Volunteer Fire Department.





## Hosmer VFD thermal imaging training

Hosmer Volunteer Fire Department did some thermal imaging camera training in conjunction with flow path in a mini house. Also, the North Central Fire Chiefs Association, which is a group made up of 10 different volunteer fire departments, recently conducted a primary search and VES training at house that was donated. First the house was used by the students who are completing FF1 and FF2 certification. The next day the primary search training was conducted and then house was burned down per the request of the owner. Departments involved included Hosmer, Roscoe, Bowdle, Leola, Eureka and Java. Submitted by Cody Wesch, Assistant Chief, Hosmer Volunteer Fire Department.

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## Pierre live burn training

The weekend of May 2-3, the Pierre Volunteer Fire Department brought the Mobile Live Fire Training Unit to town and hosted a live burn training for members and members of neighboring departments. Participating in a live burn is a requirement to finish the certified firefighter course and they were able to accomplish that requirement for eight newly certified firefighters.



# 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.

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# Volunteer \_\_\_\_\_ # Paid \_\_\_\_\_ Year Department Established: \_\_\_\_\_

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

# Pumpers \_\_\_\_\_ # Tankers \_\_\_\_\_ # Rescue \_\_\_\_\_ # Ambulance \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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# \$5 Million in Grants Now Available to Support PPE Purchases for SD Volunteer Firefighters

Volunteer firefighters across South Dakota face danger every time they respond to an emergency, and ensuring they have the proper gear is essential to their safety and effectiveness. Legislation passed during the 2026 Legislative Session and signed into law by Governor Larry Rhoden has appropriated \$5 million to the South Dakota Department of Public Safety (DPS)

to help volunteer fire departments purchase critical firefighter personal protective equipment (PPE).

“Our firefighters deserve proper equipment and facilities to keep them safe and prepared for the dangers they face every day,” said Governor Larry Rhoden. “I’ve been a volunteer fireman my whole life, so I know firsthand how necessary an investment like this is.

Thank you to all our brave men and women who step into the fire and keep our communities safe.”

The DPS State Fire Marshal’s Office is now accepting applications from volunteer fire departments whose membership is at least 70% unpaid and volunteer. Eligible departments may use grant funds to purchase essential PPE, including helmets, coats, pants, gloves,

boots, breathing apparatuses, and other personal gear required to safely perform firefighting duties.

“Our volunteer firefighters are often the first to arrive when disaster strikes, and they put themselves at risk to protect lives and property,” said DPS Cabinet Secretary Bob Perry. “This grant program helps them acquire the equipment they need to do their

jobs safely and effectively.”

Many volunteer departments continue to face financial strain due to reduced local donations and delayed fundraising efforts in recent years. These challenges have forced departments to postpone or cancel critical equipment upgrades, leaving firefighters with aging or insufficient protective gear.

“We deeply appreciate the support shown by Governor Rhoden and the Legislature,” said South Dakota Fire Marshal Doug Hinkle. “These funds will make a meaningful difference for departments that are struggling to replace outdated equipment. Our priority is to ensure the resources go where the need is greatest.”

Senate Bill 136 (SB 136) sponsored by Rep. Eric Emery and Sen. Kevin Jensen passed the legislature unanimously and directs funding to DPS for a statewide grant program supporting qualifying volunteer fire departments. The program is designed to strengthen emergency response capabilities by ensuring firefighters have access to modern protective equipment that is compliant with national fire standards.

Volunteer fire departments will receive application materials via U.S. mail and email. Applications will be accepted through August 1, 2026.

For more information or to access application materials, departments may contact the South Dakota [State Fire Marshal’s website](#).

The State Fire Marshal’s Office is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.



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## FIRE DESTROYS HOME NORTHWEST OF BROOKINGS

The Brookings County Sheriff’s Office says it happened yesterday (April 26) shortly after 5 p.m. at 2531 30th Street West.

A resident spotted a fire on the exterior of the building, spreading into the home’s interior. All occupants and pets were safely evacuated by the time fire crews arrived.

No injuries were reported. Fire crews were on scene for about three hours.

The sheriff’s office says damage to the home is estimated at \$350 thousand. The local chapter of the America Red Cross is assisting the two displaced renters.

In addition to the Brookings Fire Department and Brookings County Sheriff’s Office, all six county fire departments and the Brookings Ambulance responded. Cause of the fire remains under investigation.

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# RIT: Moving a Downed Firefighter Up Stairs

By COLE KLEINWOLTERINK

## Building Options Before the Mayday

Rapid Intervention Team training has a way of humbling firefighters quickly. The work is slow, physical, awkward, and unforgiving. Moving a downed firefighter on flat ground is difficult enough. Moving that firefighter up a stairwell, in full PPE, on air, with limited visibility and poor communication, can become one of the most demanding tasks we face on the fireground.

This drill was designed around a simple but important objective: crews must demonstrate multiple methods for moving a downed firefighter up a stairwell while managing fatigue, limited visibility, and stress. The goal is not to prove that one technique is the best but rather prove that no single technique works every time and we must have a plan A, B, C, etc. Firefighters naturally default to what they know best. When the environment is controlled, heart rates are low, and the crew is fresh, most firefighters can make their preferred technique work. But the fireground does not always give us ideal conditions. Stairwells may be narrow, cluttered, dark, smoky, or difficult to communicate in. The downed firefighter may be poorly positioned. The rescuers may already be tired before the rescue even begins.

That is why this drill is built in layers. The first level allows firefighters to work through techniques while relatively fresh. The second level adds fatigue and then removes vision. The third level adds environmental stressors that disrupt communication and force crews to problem-solve under pressure. We are not adding difficulty just to make the drill harder. We are adding stressors because stress changes performance. As fatigue builds, coordination decreases. As heart rate climbs, decision-making becomes harder. As visibility is removed, simple movements become slower and communication becomes more important. As noise and obstacles are added, firefighters are forced to adapt instead of simply repeating a clean version of a technique.

The point is not to embarrass anyone or create chaos. The point is to expose firefighters to controlled discomfort so they can identify what works, what fails, and what needs more practice before the real call comes in.

### BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

Before starting the drill, clearly explain the objective to the crew: Crews will demonstrate multiple methods for moving a downed firefighter up a stairwell while managing fatigue, limited visibility, and stress—without relying on a single technique.

A successful evolution is not always the fastest or smoothest. The value of this drill comes from

testing options, communication, teamwork, and adaptability. Some of the best learning may come from the techniques that feel awkward or fail under fatigue.

Before the main evolution, allow time for a short “show and tell.” Have members share techniques they have used, seen, or trained on for moving a downed firefighter up stairs. One firefighter may prefer using the SCBA harness. Another may use webbing. Another may use a push-pull method, leg-drive technique, or modified drag. This portion of the drill builds the toolbox before testing the tools. It also reminds firefighters that a technique that looks good in a video may feel very different in full PPE, on air, in a tight stairwell, after your heart rate is elevated.

### THE DRILL

All levels of this drill should be performed in full PPE and on air. If available, use a training mannequin. If a firefighter is used as the downed member, ensure the evolution is controlled, monitored, and safe.

### LEVEL 1: TECHNIQUE AND REPETITION

Position the downed firefighter at the base of the stairwell. Two firefighters move the downed firefighter from the bottom to the top of one flight of stairs. Once both rescuers and the downed firefighter reach the top, rapidly reset the drill and the same two firefighters immediately repeat the evolution. The key requirement is that a different technique must be used to get the downed firefighter up the stairs each time.

This level gives firefighters the chance to compare techniques while physical load is increasing. The first movement may feel strong and controlled. By the second and third movement, fatigue begins to show. Grip strength fades. Breathing rate increases. Communication may become shorter and less clear. The requirement to use three different techniques prevents the crew from staying in their comfort zone. That is the point.

### LEVEL 2: FATIGUE, THEN REDUCED VISIBILITY

Level 2 begins the same way as Level 1. Firefighters complete the first two evolutions using different techniques. By this point, their heart rates should be elevated and fatigue should be setting in. On the third evolution, remove the rescuers' vision using a BA shield or cling wrap.

This changes the drill immediately. Movements that were simple with sight become more difficult. Foot placement, hand placement, and communication become critical. Rescuers must slow down enough to maintain control but continue working with urgency. Reduced visibility forces the crew to feel the stairwell, communicate position, manage the downed firefighter's movement, and maintain orientation. It also exposes weaknesses in techniques that depend

too heavily on sight or perfect positioning.

### LEVEL 3: STRESS, NOISE, AND OBSTACLES

Level 3 follows the same structure as Level 2 but adds external stressors. Add loud music or noise distractions to disrupt communication. Place safe obstacles in the stairwell such as gear, cones, towels, hose bundles, or laundry baskets. The obstacles should be challenging but not reckless. The goal is to force problem-solving, not create unnecessary injury risk. Noise changes communication. Obstacles change movement. Reduced visibility changes orientation. Fatigue changes everything. This level more closely represents the disorder of a real fireground stairwell, where firefighters may be working around hose, debris, tools, other crews, smoke, alarms, radio traffic, and the sound of their own breathing inside the mask. The crew must still move the firefighter. They must still communicate. They must still manage air. They must still adapt.

### RUNNING THE DRILL

To keep the pace high, consider having a second victim or mannequin staged at the base of the stairs. As soon as the rescuers get the first victim to the top, they can immediately reset to the next victim without waiting for the first one to be carried back down. Instructors should also consider using a time cap. Not every crew or firefighter will be ready for the

full intensity of this drill. A time cap allows everyone to participate, receive the intended training stimulus, and disengage safely without unnecessary pressure or embarrassment if they cannot complete the full evolution.

The standard should be high, but the training environment must remain productive. We want firefighters pushed, not broken.

### DEBRIEF

The debrief is where the drill becomes more than hard work. Ask the crew:

- What techniques worked best and why?
- Which methods caused the most fatigue?
- What changed once vision was removed?
- What changed once noise and obstacles were added?
- How did communication change as fatigue increased?
- How would this translate to a real fireground stairwell?
- Would your preferred method still work if you were low on air, in a narrow stairwell, or rescuing someone larger than you?

If music was used during the drill, ask firefighters if they remember what song was playing. This can lead into a discussion about stress, perception, and auditory exclusion. Under high stress, firefighters may miss sounds, radio traffic, or details that seemed obvious to someone watching from the outside.

Whether or not they remember the song is not the point. The point is to show that stress affects awareness. When the body is under load, the brain starts filtering information. Firefighters need to understand that their perception during a high-stress event may not be as complete as they think it is.

### CONCLUSION

A downed firefighter rescue is not the time to discover that your crew only has one option. This drill gives departments a simple, low-cost way to challenge crews in a realistic and progressive manner. Start with technique. Add repetition. Add fatigue. Remove vision. Add stress. Then talk about what happened.

Do not let the first hard conversation about firefighter rescue happen after a Mayday. Have it on the training ground. Let firefighters feel the weight, frustration, air consumption, and communication breakdowns. Let them learn which techniques hold up and which ones fall apart.

A full training plan is available on the Iowa Firefighter Training Article Archive website: <https://tinyurl.com/3a3kcyh8>

*Cole Kleinwolterink 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 [kleinwolterink@gmail.com](mailto:kleinwolterink@gmail.com) with any questions, comments or inquiries.*



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## Annual Rushmore Fire Conference

Firefighters from several states gathered in Rapid City the weekend of April 25-26 for the annual Rushmore Fire Conference, an event that provides hands-on training for both career and volunteer personnel. Training sessions were split between the Rapid City Fire Department Training Tower and the Central States Fairgrounds. Participants tackled wildland fire tactics, hose management, rope rescues, vehicle extrication, and much more. "The Rushmore Fire Conference is not a classroom. It's hands-on," said Black Hawk Fire Department Chief Kurt Klunder, "Firefighters learn better by doing hands-on than sitting in a classroom looking just at PowerPoint." The annual conference helps crews get training they may not have access to locally. Over 96% of fire departments in South Dakota are volunteer-based, and many rural departments do not have the budgets or to conduct highly specialized rescue courses. By consolidating resources at the conference, crews from several communities, even outside of South



Dakota, are able to keep up-to-date on all training requirements. The Rushmore Fire Conference was backed by the Pennington County Fire Chiefs. This year's event drew participants from Deadwood, Custer, Spearfish, and St. Onge as well as crews traveling from North Dakota and Colorado. At the fairgrounds, firefighters focused on the "Man Versus Machine" course, learning how to use everyday garage tools like grinders and wrenches to rescue people trapped in industrial or agricultural equipment. The hands-on stations included an impalement simulator, as well as scenarios involving snowblowers and grain augers. "Our whole goal here is to just give our first responders some skills and using tools in a different environment that we might run across, so that they have the option to get somebody out as fast as possible," said Lt. Wesley Lewis, an instructor visiting from the Westerville, Ohio Division of Fire. Despite the geographic distance between Ohio and South Dakota and a difference in populations, Lewis emphasized that the hazards first responders face remains universal. "We still follow the same principles across the country," Lewis said, "The whole idea is that anybody can go anywhere and do these things, because we all have the same environments." The Rushmore Fire Conference wrapped up Sunday, sending highly trained crews back to their communities. As for the Rapid City Fire Department, they will continue to expand their own ranks, holding a graduation ceremony for their new recruits on Friday, May 1 at Fire Station 1.





## Tea VFD certified firefighting class

Tea Volunteer Fire Department's latest certified firefighting class was reaching a successful end. Members attended their live burn on May 3. A controlled burn inside a burn building shows members important behaviors of fire that they might see in an actual fire.



## Sioux Falls Fire Rescue to break ground on next station

The 13th fire station in the city of Sioux Falls breaks ground this week.

13 bidders and came in nearly \$250,000 less than estimated. Puetz Design + Build was the contractor selected, and the business is located just blocks from the fire station's location.

"It will be their neighborhood fire station," McAreavey said.

The single-story station will be designed similar to the city's last fire station, which was built in 2020 and is designed for a four-person crew. It also includes report-to-work areas for fire and building inspectors, along with landing spots allowing workspace.

"The parcel that we purchased is just shy of 6 acres, so we are contemplating there would be room for additional city services one day, whether it be law enforcement report-to-work or additional support services," McAreavey said.

Fire Rescue will be hiring 15 people to support the fire station. The annual application period ends Thursday, May 14.

"Applications have been coming in slightly ahead of previous years," McAreavey said, adding that the city's new public safety training center is "huge" for supporting new recruits.

The hope is to open the new fire station in early 2027.

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It will serve the growing northwest part of the community, an area that includes the booming employment center at Foundation Park — home to Amazon and the future location of CJ Schwan's and Smithfield Foods.

"It's an (industrial) area, and I anticipate there will be growth in density and multifamily housing," Fire Chief Matt McAreavey said.

A grid laid out in 2018 helps the city determine when and where to build new stations, he added. One key determinant is that a station be located within 5 miles of wherever its crew might need to respond.

The northwest, particularly Foundation Park, now is an area outside of 5 miles from the closest fire station, "and some of those response times can exceed eight to 10 minutes," McAreavey said. "Our stated standard is (responding to) 90 percent of emergency calls in four minutes."

The station at 5200 N. Career Ave. will break ground at 11:30 a.m. Thursday.

The \$5.2 million project drew

# SD Wildland Fire Introduces Mascot: Flash Wild

South Dakota Wildland Fire now has its own mascot, "Flash Wild". Flash is South Dakota's fire prevention fox.

At a press conference on April 24, we officially introduced Flash to the public for the first time. It was a soft launch as his actual physical mascot suit is in production and expected to be ready to meet and greet the public in about a year. SDWF plans to have a full celebration when the physical mascot arrives.

"Flash Wild's mission is to help educate South Dakotans about wildfire prevention, preparedness, and safety," Sage-Morris says. "His image is already helping us connect with children, families, and the public in a friendly and memorable way."

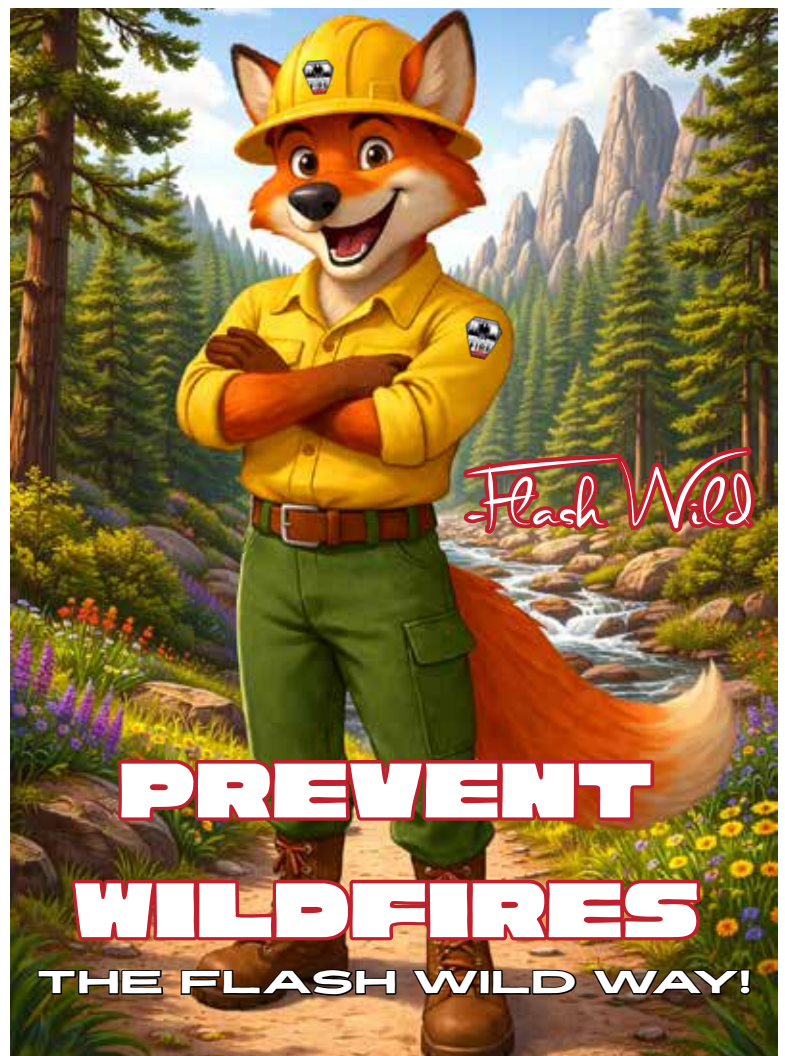
This one-of-a-kind mascot was created through the imagination and creativity of SDWF's Prevention Program Manager, Amanda Sage-Morris. We wanted a mascot to represent the state of South Dakota's Wildland Fire service, and our prevention program, just like many other state fire services utilize.

3 years ago, Amanda brought in a colored pencil sketch of what has now become Flash Wild. When management gave her the green light to pursue the process of creating her vision into a mascot, she took the project, ran with it, and hasn't stopped since.

Through a lot of hard work, and with the help of a grant specifically for this purpose, Flash has now gone from an idea to a reality. She says the public will be seeing a lot of him wherever SDWF shares prevention and wildland fire safety messages. Flash will be at schools, parades, job fairs, and other community events.

He is already on fire prevention themed stickers, frisbees, and was the character in this year's coloring contest.

For many years SDWF has been fortunate to use the federal fire prevention mascot, Smokey Bear. Everyone loves Smokey. Now, instead of borrowing another entity's mascot, SDWF has its own. SDWF intends for Flash to be the centerpiece and lovable face of our prevention program for years and decades to come.



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