

# South Dakota FIREFIGHTER

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MAY 2026 • VOL. 19 - NO. 3

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## 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**

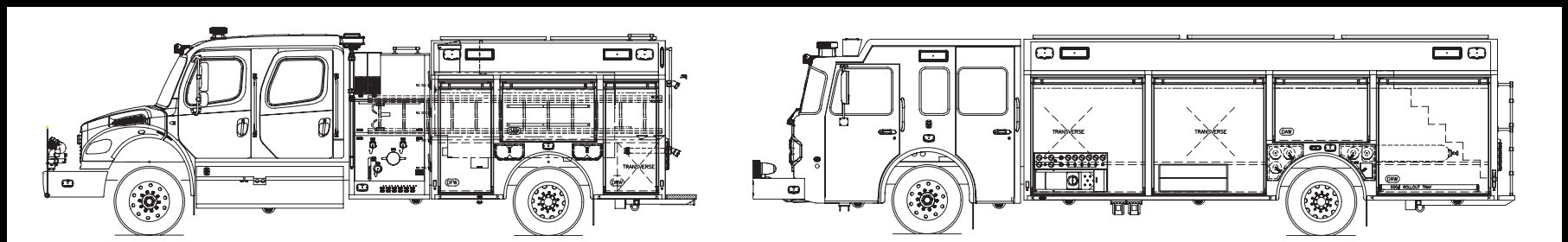
*LATC Events Center (approx. 4:30pm)*



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## Rapid Valley Structure Fire Escalates to Two Alarms

The Rapid Valley Volunteer Fire Department responded to a reported structure fire in the 2300 block of Cattle Dr, Rapid Valley, unincorporated, Pennington County, South Dakota.

First arriving 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 struc-

tures, infra-structure, ranching assets and other improvements.

The fire eventually escalated to two alarms.

Minor injuries to two civilians was reported with one Firefighter transported to Monument Hospital for further evaluation.

Agencies Responding: Pennington County 911, Rapid Valley Volunteer Fire Department, Box Elder Volunteer Fire Department, North Haines Volunteer Fire Department,

Black Hawk Volunteer Fire Department, Rockerville Volunteer Fire Department, Whispering Pines Volunteer Fire Department, Battle Creek Fire Department, Rapid City Fire Department & Ambulance Service, Pennington County Sheriffs office. Ellsworth Airforce Base Fire Department. West River Electrical Cooperative and the American Red Cross serving central and western South Dakota.

## Black Hawk VFD called to structure fire

On March 25, Black Hawk Volunteer Fire Department, responded to a reported structure fire in the 6000 block of Polk St, incorporated Summerset, Meade 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, and residential structures, causing smoke, heat, fire damage and evacuations. Rapid attack by firefighters contained the fire, stopping further threats to population and damage to infrastructure and other improvements, the incident did escalate to two alarms. Of the four occupants of the structure, three received treatment on scene and were released, a fourth was transported to Monument hospital by ambulance for further evaluation. A neighbor did receive treatment on scene for minor injuries and was released. The American Red Cross Serving Central and Western South Dakota, family and neighbors are assisting the residents. Assisting agencies included Pennington County 911, Meade County Dispatch, Meade County Sheriff's Office, Summerset Police Department, Black Hawk Volunteer Fire Department, Black Hawk Fire Corp, Piedmont Fire and Ambulance Service, North Haines Volunteer Fire Department, Rapid City Fire Department and Ambulance Service, Whispering Pines Volunteer Fire Department, Ellsworth Air Force Base Fire Department, Box Elder Volunteer Fire Department, Rapid Valley Volunteer Fire Department, Doty Volunteer Fire Department, Johnson Siding Volunteer Fire Department, Black Hills Energy, Montana Dakota Utilities, American Red Cross Serving Central and Western South Dakota and the South Dakota Fire Marshalls Office. Photo courtesy of Black Hawk Volunteer Fire Department.

# CLASSIFIEDS

### CLASSIFIED ADS FOR THE NEBRASKA FIREFIGHTER NEWSPAPER

Classified ads run \$10 for the first 10 words, and 25 cents a word after that. A photo is \$10 additional. Rates are the same in each state (Iowa, Minnesota, South Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas).

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We welcome your views, opinions, news tips and questions. Letters to the editor must be accompanied by a name and daytime telephone number, and may be edited for space.

# Strong El Niño predicted to bring warmer, drier conditions to Black Hills

By SARA MORGAN,  
Black Hills Pioneer

Sub-surface waters in the eastern Pacific Ocean near the equator are expected to be warmer than average this summer, pushing warmer winds across the northern hemisphere this summer. For the Black Hills, that means there is a strong likelihood that warm and dry weather patterns could persist through the summer and into the fall.

Melissa Smith, a hydrologist and meteorologist at the National Weather Service in Rapid City, said that the warmer waters in the eastern region of the Pacific Ocean near the equator will create an El Niño, pushing warmer weather patterns across the northern hemisphere. As a result of the warmer conditions and increased water vapors in the air, westerly winds will push storm systems across the United States. A strong El Niño, a result of sub-surface water temperatures measuring approximately 2 degrees Celsius warmer than

average, means that the storm systems are likely to be pushed farther south than the Black Hills, creating warmer, drier conditions through the summer and fall.

“What (an El Niño) does, is it helps determine the position of the jet streams, so where the storms are going to track, where warmer weather air ends up settling over the continental United States,” said Smith. “So, if we were to go into a strong El Niño, which the possibilities this year are above average, that means that we are probably looking at greater conditions for warmer conditions this summer and great chances for drier conditions this summer.”

Smith said that if the predictions of the National Weather Service and Climate Prediction Center are correct, the conditions could be compounded by the results of last

year’s warm winter.

“Typically, in the winter we see anywhere from about 8-15% of our annual moisture, so we don’t have a lot of precipitation that we tend to get during the winter,” Smith said. “But usually, we get our spring snow storms and our spring precipitation which can then help us carry on for the year. With such a warm winter this year, there was a lot of areas where the ground didn’t freeze very deep. By the time we got even a little bit of snow, the ground was already thawed. Therefore, we didn’t see very much run off this season. Without that runoff, we have a lot of dry stock ponds, and a lot of the lakes are all lower than average because of it.”

Smith said the lower levels of stock ponds and lakes, existing fire dangers, and predicted dry and

warm conditions could mean that the fire risk will remain high in the Black Hills region.

“Right now we have very high danger across the entire area, especially in the Southern Black Hills,” Smith said. “They’ve been having a lot of wind, and with the hot and dry conditions, it has increased the fire danger. There are areas in the Southern Black Hills and even into portions of the Central Black Hills that are in extreme, D3-level drought, along with most of Southwestern South Dakota. Conditions tend to change pretty much north of Highway 212, they start to improve as you get into Northwestern South Dakota. But on hot and windy days, the wind can carry fire. We still have a lot of dead grasses out there.”

Smith said to prepare for the possibility of a strong El Niño

creating a warm and dry growing season, people with lawns and gardens should brace themselves for seasonal water limitations.

To know if your area is under a seasonal water restriction, check with your local municipal government.

Smith said that historically the Black Hills region cycles through wet and dry seasons lasting an average of 5-15 years. The last dry period lasted from 2000-2008 before transitioning to a wet period that lasted from 2008-2021.

“That was a longer wet period than we will typically see, but it looks like we’re likely going into a drier period,” said Smith. “How bad that dry period will be and how long it will last, that’s still to be seen.”

## 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

Last month I started the discussion about keeping our balance in fire service. What I am learning about balance as I pass the 3 score and ten mark, is that balance gets to be more of a challenge each year. I think the same is true of our life as volunteers. It is easy to lose sight of what is important in life when the call of the "page" is ringing in our ear. However, balance is possible, but remember keeping our balance also requires adjustments on our part. Here we go for round #2.

The story is told (No, this is not autobiographical) of a young pastor was officiating at the funeral of a war veteran. The dead man's military friends wished to have a part in the service at the funeral home, so they requested the pastor to lead them down to the casket, stand with them for a solemn moment of remembrance, and then lead them out through the side door. This he proceeded to do, but unfortunately the effect was somewhat marred when he picked the wrong door. The result was that they marched with military precision into a broom closet, in full

view of the mourners, and had to beat a hasty retreat covered with confusion. This true story illustrates a cardinal rule or two. First, if you're going to lead, make sure you know where you're going. Second, if you're going to follow, make sure that you are following someone who knows what he is doing!

In terms of following someone who knows where he is going, I think Matt Aalto has laid out a pretty good direction for us to follow. After Matt told us we need some respected encouragers, someone to give us constructive feedback, he encouraged us to learn to say no. That is a hard one for me. As many of you know Custer recently experienced the largest wildland fire in the last several years. I was part of the initial attack and spent the better part of 9 hours on structure protection (I am much too old to be cutting fire line). However, the next day the request went out to staff the tender (tanker for you East River dwellers). You don't know how hard it was to me to admit that I can no longer work back-to-back 12-hour

shifts, even from the comfort of the cab of a truck! I had to say no! Matt would congratulate me on saying no, because when we are overloaded with work, our productivity will decline. Also be aware when you say no, others in your department will sometimes pressure you to do more than you should. (To the credit of Custer Fire, they allowed me to graciously decline.) When you say no, you will need to communicate your priorities and explain how that is in alignment with your volunteer position.

Second, learn to recognize burnout signs. (I wish I had learned this twenty years ago). If you are starting to feel frustrated before you respond to a call, that could be an early sign of burnout. A good test is this: "When I started volunteering, would this have mattered?" I think we should all take Matt's words to heart; "It is not uncommon to have some degree of drama or dissatisfaction in the firehouse, but when people join the service, they typically have a very high tolerance to this. It's only after burnout begins that these issues



Rodney Veldhuizen, Chaplain

"At the end of the day, finding a healthy balance between responding to calls and taking care of our personal life is essential. Although the commitment to serving the community is admirable, the mental, physical, and emotional toll of constant emergency responses without proper self-care can and typically leads to burnout, health issues, and strained relationships."

begin to chip away at the reasons why they joined." I would add that when the drama starts to overwhelm and consume your life, it might be time to go fishing or hiking! (Long walks in the woods is my own personal therapy choice).

What if you find yourself unable to shake those feelings? What if the frustration and aggravation continue to mount? Then it's time to make a change. You might think about a short leave from the department to revisit your priorities? It may be time to ask the question once again what is important in my life? Where is my first commitment? Maybe you need to consider a change in your role in the department. Maybe you promoted to Captain but your first passion is interior attack, or pump operator, or heaven forbid, tender operator (I recently learned that is better known as "Tender Trash".) Maybe you need to take another class to expand your working knowledge or break up the monotony. You might want to seek out one of your peer support team, maybe the employee assistance program, your chaplain or a trusted friend. I have a suggestion, that doesn't come from me, but inquires from others who have been around for a while. If you would like to live out your faith in the fire service, but over the years you find it is time for a change, why not check out a class on being a Chaplain? (This is a bit self-serving I know as I am trainer for the Federation of Fire Chaplains.) The reason for this suggestion is I am finding some folks with experience see this as a natural extension of their commitment to serve.

I want to give you Matt's last suggestion in his own words: "Lastly, be prepared to walk away. Although it may seem taboo to encourage leaving the service, in some cases, it's the right thing to

do. If your family or other relationships are suffering from your absence at home, your presence at the fire station will certainly be impacted when on the line. If you are no longer able to thrive in your department due to change of staff, personnel issues, or other frustrations even after exploring some of these suggestions, it's time to put yourself first and move on."

At the end of the day, finding a healthy balance between responding to calls and taking care of our personal life is essential. Although the commitment to serving the community is admirable, the mental, physical, and emotional toll of constant emergency responses without proper self-care can and typically leads to burnout, health issues, and strained relationships. By making time for family, rest and personal interests allows us as firefighters to recharge and stay focused. Ultimately, a balanced approach will ensure that you remain resilient, capable and present, both at the station and in our personal lives, which in the end benefits our health, our loved ones and the community we serve.

One last bit of insight from the Chaplain. It is a lesson I learned while a Freshman in College. (Yes, they had colleges in the "Stone age"). I took a Senior Life Saving Class to fulfill part of my physical education requirement. The first rule I learned in that class is that if I cannot save myself, I cannot save someone else! That may sound harsh, but if you burn out and cannot continue to serve as a fire fighter, how can you help save someone else. Take a few minutes and consider what do I need to do to either maintain or regain my balance in fire service?

Blessings!

CHAPLAIN RODNEY

**JIM STEVENS  
MEMORIAL RIDE**

**June 27, 2026**

Registration: 9:00 AM @ Hot Springs Fire Hall

Kickstands Up: 10:00 AM

Route: TBD

Final Destination: American Legion, Hot Springs

\$ Ride Fee: \$20 per Rider  
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All proceeds raised will go to the Hot Springs Volunteer Fire Department

## Rapid Valley Commercial Structure Fire

The Rapid Valley Volunteer Fire Department responded to a reported structure fire on Lamb Rd., Rapid Valley, unincorporated, Pennington County, South Dakota. First arriving firefighters found a fire and smoke condition, in the walls and roof assembly of a commercial structure.

Firefighters, successfully contained the fire to the structure and area of origin protecting adjacent structures, infrastructure and other improvements.

No injuries to civilians or do-

mestic animals were reported.

Agencies Responding: Pennington County 911, Rapid Valley Volunteer Fire Department, Box Elder Volunteer Fire Department, North Haines Volunteer Fire Department, Black Hawk Volunteer Fire Department, Rapid City Fire Department & Ambulance Service, Ellsworth Airforce Base Fire Department, Pennington County Emergency Management, Black Hills Electrical Cooperative, Montana Dakota Utilities.

# DEPARTED FIREFIGHTERS

## Jim Robert Johnson 1950-2026

Quinn Volunteer Fire Department Assistant Chief, Jim Robert Johnson was born September 18, 1950, in Wall, South Dakota, the son of Arnold and Minnie Johnson, joining his sister Bonnie.

Jim grew up on the Albert and Johanna Geige homestead with his parents and sister.

Jim was united in marriage to Jean Kitterman on February 3, 1978; and to this union three daughters were born: Jana, Jackie, and Jennifer.

He was a member of the Wall School Board, the Quinn Volunteer Fire Department, and the Peno Basin Township.

A steward of the land whose greatest joy was cruising through his cows, or his 1968 Chev-elle, with his wife. He loved supporting his kids through-

out the years and watching his grandkids in all their activities.

His love to visit and smile never failed to make friends everywhere he went.

Survivors include his wife Jean; three daughters Jana Bielmaier and her husband Craig and their children Ryon, Jocelyn and Kinsey; Jackie Roseth and her husband Thor and their son Royce; and Jennifer Richter and her husband Dalton and their children Dylan, Rylee, and Tyen; and a host of other relatives and friends.

Jim was preceded in death by his parents and sister Bonnie Kjerstad.

Visitation was held on Tuesday, April 21, 2026, at the Quinn Fire station followed by a procession to the Wall cemetery.



# Behind the Scenes of Wildfire Investigation

When a wildfire starts the first priority is protecting lives and property but as soon as firefighters arrive investigators get to work.

By DAVE KIDD, NewsCenter1

When a wildfire starts — the first priority is protecting lives and property. But as soon as firefighters arrive — investigators get to work. Cody Griffiee with South Dakota Wildland Fire says, “Usually we try to investigate it immediately, whether it’s just securing a scene or getting investigator on site right away, we try to get it done within the first 24 hours. At least. We want to preserve everything we could find, so even just spraying water in a certain area can actually hinder some operations.”

But when conditions are right — a fire can grow quickly. Sometimes hundreds — even thousands

of acres in the first hour. With so much ground to cover — where do they start? Cody Griffiee says, “We start with the more intense area that burns so a lot of the stuff people see in the videos and on the news and stuff like that, and then we’ll work back. Really the fire is actually the best teller of its story. We can look at the different patterns, the different indicators, is what we call them, even just something as simple as the way the grass blade falls, can point US in the right direction. As far as physical evidence goes, kind of the biggest thing you know, if it’s in a field or in the forest and it doesn’t look like it belongs there, it probably doesn’t.”

Many of the tools investigators use have been around for years; pin flags, magnifying glasses, and pen and paper. But new technology is changing the way they work. Cody Griffiee says, “We have the ability to pull satellite imagery. We can launch drones for aerial images. We have metal detectors. We have all sorts of new technology.”

The Black Hills are a big area. And with time critical — agencies often work together. Cody Griffiee, “There’s a lot of times where we’ll all be working together to figure out that common cause, and it’s not uncommon for us as like state employees, to go investigate a Forest Service fire or a BIA fire.” State law requires that investigators look into every unnatural wildfire. Griffiee says, what they learn can help prevent the next one.

# Smokey Bear Award

Eric O’Connor

The Rapid City Fire Department is proud to recognize Captain Eric O’Connor for receiving the 2026 Bronze Smokey Bear Award for state-level efforts in wildfire prevention. USDA Forest Service Chief Thomas M. Schultz, Jr. recently announced the 2026 Smokey Bear Award winners, recognizing outstanding service in wildfire prevention. Captain O’Connor was honored for his leadership, dedication, and commitment to making the community safer and stronger through wildfire prevention and mitigation. The partners behind the wildfire prevention legend Smokey Bear and his public service advertisement campaign—the longest running in United States history—are pleased to announce the recipients of the 2026 Smokey Bear Award.

In the world of wildfire prevention, there is no greater honor than receiving a Smokey Bear Award. The National Association of State Foresters (NASF), the Ad Council, and the USDA Forest Service, which together make up the Co-operative Forest Fire Prevention Committee (CFFP), have managed these awards since the 1950s.

“These awardees demonstrate what fire prevention looks like in

action,” said U.S. Forest Service Deputy Chief Sarah Fisher. “Their efforts protect lives, support firefighters, and make a real difference in communities across the country.”

The Smokey Bear Awards are reserved for individuals, teams, and organizations that provide outstanding service with significant and sustained program impact in the wildfire prevention arena. This year, five individuals and four teams have earned prestigious recognition for fire prevention work in their communities.



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# SDFA OFFICER REPORTS



Charlie Kludt, President

"The election for SDFA President will be taking place at State Fire School on Saturday, 13 June. The slate of candidates will be announced in the next paper and online."

## What do you need..?

Do you have your department contact information updated with the Fire Marshals Office?

The legislative funded fire grant assistance program information will be coming to your department mail and email you have for your annual department certification in the next few weeks. If you are not sure who is listed or if your certification has been turned in, contact the fire marshals' office.

The fire grant, like before, will be for PPE. If you know you will be applying for the grant, I would start putting your needs list and prices together so you are ready

when the application period opens. The FMO is anticipating an easier flow since the process is in place. They are making some minor updates and adjustments.

State Fire School class listings are out, and registration is open. We try to have a mix of hand-on and all day classes, as well as, the partial day and classroom settings. Firefighting isn't just hard work and sweating.

The election for SDFA President will be taking place at State Fire School on Saturday, 13 June.

The slate of candidates will be announced in the next paper and online.

The National Volunteer Fire

Council (NVFC) spring conference will be taking place in May at Alexandria, Va. Dan Hodge, Craig Johnson and I will be attending the conference and meeting with our congressional delegates.

Some of the ongoing concerning fire service issues are the NFPA and OSHA proposal for regulations for specialized, corporate fire brigades and rescue teams to become regulations for all fire departments. The NVFC has a taskforce of individuals working with other fire service organizations to bring to light the actual viability and necessity of making the NFPA standards to OSHA regulations.

One current proposal is to exclude departments serving populations under 5000. In South Dakota, there are currently 22 communities over 5000 in population.

Although this raised questions of defining how the population served is determined, it is roughly 70 percent of the 29,500 fire departments in the United States. It is just under 50 percent of all departments that serve a population of 2500 or less. So, this number is substantial.

The area served and population served became a side conversation, in that, 70 percent of the U.S.

population is served by 18 percent of the mostly fulltime departments. But the coverage area served by volunteer departments was overwhelmingly greater.

If the proposed regulations were addressing major issues of fire service safety and line of duty deaths, I would fully agree. We all want to be safe and go home after every call.

The SDFA General Membership meeting will be held during State Fire School on 12 & 13 June. If you topics you would like to discuss, let your district representative know.

If your department had a current or retired member pass away, we will be honoring them at the Firefighters' Memorial Service at fire school on Friday evening. If you have someone to add to the honor list, send your department name, their name and, if possible, a photo of the individual to our SDFA email contact.

Mother's Day is coming soon.

See you in Watertown at Fire School,  
Stay Safe,

CHARLIE KLUDT  
SDFA President

## Thoughts From the Tailboard

Have you noticed the main topic, and sometimes the only topic of conversation is the weather? Whether you like the warm dry conditions or not, that's the hand we are dealing with. No area is immune from it. We keep hoping for moisture, but at the same time we all expect to wake up, look out the window, and see four feet of snow and 30 mph winds.

Our neighbors to the south have had what has got to be the most devastating months. Nearly three quarters of a million acres burned. I'm sure many of the hundreds of fire departments will have a tough time paying for repairs, fuel and all the other expenses. For the ranch-

ers and farmers that lost pasture and livestock my heart goes out to them. Sometimes when a rancher has a fire and loses pasture a neighbor will help him out. But what do you do when all you can see for miles is black? Keep everyone in your prayers and thoughts. They can use all the help.

In the past month, the Black Hills has had its share of fires too. Nothing like Nebraska thankfully but keeping all of us on our toes. Several east river fire departments have been out here or currently are and we thank you for coming to help us.

Now for a personal thought. Ok, I'm not going to say I'm old, but I have collected more than one social security check. Enough said. So, when the Coyote Flats Fire kicked off I of course jumped on a truck along with other North Haines

## Introducing SDFA's New Executive Director & Management Transition

The South Dakota Firefighters Association (SDFA) is excited to share that we began a new partnership with Advanced Association Management (AAM) this January. I'd also like to take a moment to introduce myself. My name is Taylor Moore, and I will be serving as the new Executive Director for SDFA. I'm a Senior Account Executive with AAM and have the opportunity to work with several fire service associations. I'm looking forward to getting to know SDFA and supporting the great work being done across the state.

Right now, we are in a transition period and working closely with SDFA leadership to ensure every-

thing continues to run smoothly. After the conclusion of the 2026 Fire School, our office will officially take over all management and administrative responsibilities for the Association.

Our goal is to make this transition as seamless as possible while continuing to support SDFA's events, programs, and members every step of the way.

If you need anything or have questions, don't hesitate to reach out. You can contact the SDFA Office at 605-501-2162 or by email at [info@sdfirefighters.org](mailto:info@sdfirefighters.org).

I'm excited to get started and look forward to connecting with many of you soon.



Denny Gorton,  
Retired Treasurer/Past President

"That made me think about a saying I saw the other day. "My brain says I'm 35; my body says my brain is an idiot." I'm sure there are many of you out there who would agree. The difficult part is when this firefighting gets in your blood it just does not go away. (Thank goodness it doesn't!)"

Firefighters and we went to pitch in. I must admit it took me at least two days, and several Ibuprofen's, for all my joints, muscles to quit hurting. That made me think about a saying I saw the other day. "My brain says I'm 35; my body says my brain is an idiot." I'm sure there are many of you out there who would

agree. The difficult part is when this firefighting gets in your blood it just does not go away. (Thank goodness it doesn't).

A change in thoughts. The position of President of the SD Firefighters Association is open this year. Elections will be held at the membership meeting. If you have ever thought of wanting to direct and guide this great organization, now is your chance. If you have a deep desire and willingness to serve, then throw your hat into the ring. There are names and contact info in this issue.

Somewhere in this issue is a notice that the North Haines VFD is having their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in June. I am the last original charter member of the department. I see in the paper that there have been other firefighters around the state who were recognized for their many years of service. To all of you who have dedicated your life to this unpaid profession I tip my helmet to you and say job well done, job well done.

With all this rambling and not really having anything to say, I'll sign off. Remember to look before you pull into that field or wherever, know what the fire is doing.

Be safe.

Denny Gorton,  
SDFA Treasurer



# SDFA OFFICER REPORTS

## HELLO SOUTH DAKOTA FIREFIGHTERS:

There was an email that went out mid-April that announced the SDFA board partnering with Advanced Association Management (AAM). We made the decision to do this for several reasons, including but not all, the handling of contracts for Instructors at state fire school, making sure we are following all tax laws, keeping true records of business meetings and the list goes on. In recent years the board has taken on new responsibilities like the MLFTU trailers, and we are all volunteers like most of you, with limited time. As you

hopefully noticed we got registration for state fire school open on April 15 this year. This is the goal every year but various setbacks, mostly time due to other commitments, delayed this. Having AAM manage the contracts and get the registration page set up ready to go live helped this happen. This is one example of how this partnership will benefit South Dakota Firefighters.

Now to something to think about in the training area. The SDFA is charged with providing training to firefighters. The board spends time going to various conferences, other state fire schools and looking at

proposals from people wanting to present at fire school trying to find new ways to train. Recently I was made aware of something from my own fire department. There was some training conducted where a few "senior" firefighters trained some "newer" firefighters and one of the things that came out of this was the newer members can sometimes be intimidated in larger group (especially if there are several "senior" members present) training situations. They can be hesitant to step up to do hands on activities or ask questions, afraid of being embarrassed. We may need to think about training in



Don Ward, Vice President

"As you hopefully noticed we got registration for state fire school open on April 15 this year."

smaller groups within our departments and to giving more time for discussion before getting to the hands-on portion. The more tools we have to train with the better we will be able to train.

Now get on the SDFA website

and get registered for state fire school.

Train hard and stay safe,

Don Ward,  
VP SDFA

## Fire reported in Argyle area

On March 20 at approximately 3:25 p.m., Custer County Sheriff's Office was alerted to a fire in the Argyle area. Several fire agencies collaborated, utilizing two helicopters and an aircraft to tackle the flames. Given the close proximity of residents, evacuation protocols were activated. Firefighters worked tirelessly to contain the fire, successfully stopping its forward movement. Thanks to the Custer County Communications Center, Search and Rescue, Emergency Management, Hot Springs and Custer Ambulance Services, Fall River County Sheriff's Office, and the South Dakota Highway Patrol for their crucial assistance.



# 2025 AGENDA - GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Call to order @ 0730am CT – Friday, 13 June 2025

Pledge of Allegiance  
Moment of Silence for Fallen Firefighters  
Invocation  
Parliamentarian Vice President Don Ward  
Introduction of S DFA Board Members  
Welcome Comments from Guests  
State officials, Watertown staff City, LATC Staff  
Approval of agenda  
Motion to approve Agenda J.D. Geigle, Spearfish Canyon FD 2nd Bryan Baker, Tea VFD

### MINUTES OF 2024 ANNUAL GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING MINUTES - AS PRINTED IN S DFA PAPER

Motion to approve 2024 meeting minutes as printed in the May paper (*below*) Scott Jongbloed Watertown FD, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Leroy Ainslie Fedora FD

Treasurer’s Report – Gorton – as printed in S DFA paper (motion to approve after audit)  
Establish Audit committee - Kevin, Corey, Arron.

Motion by Steve Oberle Tea Fire Department 2<sup>nd</sup> by Brian Schmidt Tea Fire Department  
Doug Kirkus, SDML Workers

Comp representative, talked about the program

Steve Willard talked about legislative items, new legislators need to make new relationships and educate them on the fire service and how it is structured in South Dakota.

### BUSINESS

Comments and Questions from General Membership  
Newly Certified Firefighters to State Fire School

### LEGISLATIVE REPORT

NVFC - Spring meeting report; Charlie gave an over of NVFC and explanation of the entity, Deal with NFPA Committees, PFoss forever chemicals, looking at the correlation of the standards. Federal grant programs VFA 50/50 grants, the more grants that are applied for the more money may be available to utilize. OSHA wanted to take NFPA standards and make them standards. Slide to the back burner, OSHA is taking another look. AFG Grants priority items bunker gear, SCBA, and Thermal Imagers. Went over being a member of NVFC. Independent Insurance Agents of South Dakota Grant, South Dakota Salutes Grants 10 \$5,000 grants for 2025

Recess until 430pm on Saturday.

### RECONVENE SATURDAY, 14 JUNE 2025 @04:54PM - MEMBERSHIP MEETING AND CLOSING CEREMONY -

### S DFA UPDATES AND HAPPENINGS

Audit Committee Report – (motion to approve)  
Recognitions: a) New Certified FFs; b) Scholarship winners; c) Service Longevity  
Final Comments & Benediction

Next Membership meetings:  
Fall Fire Conference, 10-12 October 2025, Spearfish, SD  
State Fire School 2026, 12-13 June, LATC, Watertown  
Scholarship winners 2025 Parker Wilson Tea  
Brayden Hanson Ramona

Recognized Dennis Gorton for his service on the South Dakota Firefighters Association and to the fire Service.

Motion to Adjourn 2025 State Fire School General Membership meeting

Dennis Gorton North Haines, 2<sup>nd</sup> Steve Oberle Tea VFD

Submitted by  
SAMARA ERICKSON,  
S DFA Secretary

General Fund 2024 Inc/Exp - Last year 1/1/2024 through 12/31/2024		
Category	1/1/2024-12/31/2024	OVERALL TOTAL
<b>INCOME</b>		
DOT Income	270	270
Fall Conference Income	4,740	4,740
Fallen Fighters Memorial	521	521
INTEREST	1,717	1,717
MEMBERSHIP-MEMBERSHIP INCOME	80,557	80,557
S DFA Auxillary Income	744	744
State Fire School	27,671	27,671
FROM Gen Fund 6 Month CD 1038930...	5	5
FROM GENL FUND MONEY MARKET ...	29,416	29,416
FROM GF Sav DSFCU 1038930 A	1,961	1,961
FROM MEMORIAL FUND SAVINGS D...	674	674
FROM REG FUND SAVINGS 1056040 A	44,704	44,704
FROM SCHOLARSHIP FUND CHECK ...	5,763	5,763
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>198,744</b>	<b>198,744</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
Uncategorized	0	0
Board Travel Expenses	6,885	6,885
Contract	12,420	12,420
DUES-NVFC,CongFireSer,Jt Count	0	0
Fall Conference Expense	8,134	8,134
FALLEN FIREFIGHTER MEMORIAL-E...	3,555	3,555
INSURANCE-INSURANCE (ROBOT, B...	69,848	69,848
Membership Drive	1,211	1,211
Membership Software	16,444	16,444
MISC	31	31
Mobile Fire Trailer #1 - Expense	148	148
Mobile Fire Trailer #2 - Expense	40	40
NEWSLETTER	40,950	40,950
NVFC-NVFC EXPENSES FOR 1 MTG.	5,220	5,220
OFFICE EXPENSE	3,436	3,436
PRINTING	32	32
Scholarship	1,000	1,000
SD FIRE SCHOOL-FIRESCHOOL EXP...	27,689	27,689
SD Joint Council	750	750
VOIDED	0	0
TO Gen Fund 6 Month CD 1038930-9/...	31,377	31,377
TO GF CHECKING DSFCU 1038930 7	45,379	45,379
TO GF Sav DSFCU 1038930 A	5	5
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>274,554</b>	<b>274,554</b>
<b>OVERALL TOTAL</b>	<b>-75,809</b>	<b>-75,809</b>

State Fund 2024 Inc Exp - Last year 1/1/2024 through 12/31/2024		
Category	1/1/2024-12/31/2024	OVERALL TOTAL
<b>INCOME</b>		
INTEREST	864	864
State Fund Budget	218,045	218,045
FROM STATE FUND MONEY MARKE...	122,908	122,908
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>341,817</b>	<b>341,817</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
District Fire Schools-DISTRICT FIRES...	9,933	9,933
Fall Conference Expense	12,007	12,007
Mobile Fire Trailer #1 - Expense	12,972	12,972
Mobile Fire Trailer #2 - Expense	4,782	4,782
OFFICE EXPENSE	126	126
SD FIRE SCHOOL-FIRESCHOOL EXP...	85,633	85,633
VOIDED	0	0
TO STATE FUND CHECKING DSFCU ...	122,908	122,908
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>248,361</b>	<b>248,361</b>
<b>OVERALL TOTAL</b>	<b>93,457</b>	<b>93,457</b>
Net Worth 2024 YTD - As of 12/31/2024 (Includes unrealized gains)		
Account		12/31/2024 Balance
<b>ASSETS</b>		
<b>Cash and Bank Accounts</b>		
Gen Fund 6 Month CD 1038930-9/22/05		38,395.78
GEN FUND SCHOLARSHIP CD1027050D 10-7-27-Matures 10/7/27, 1.8...		39,212.29
GENL FUND MONEY MARKET DSFCU103890M-Dues Interest Bearing ...		3.38
GF CHECKING DSFCU 1038930 7		35,782.66
GF Sav DSFCU 1038930 A		5.08
MEMORIAL FUND SAVINGS DSFCU 1027050 A-Membership Acct.		4,449.95
REG FUND SAVINGS 1056040 A		25,911.58
STATE FUND CHECKING DSFCU 1039100 7		2,100.88
STATE FUND MONEY MARKET DSFCU 1039100 M		228,851.03
STATE FUND MEMB ACCT SAV DSFCU 1039100 A		5.08
<b>TOTAL Cash and Bank Accounts</b>		<b>374,517.69</b>
<b>Other Assets</b>		
<b>TOTAL Other Assets</b>		<b>0.00</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>		<b>374,517.69</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>374,517.69</b>

## Notice of the 2026 S DFA General Membership Meeting and Election

**DATE:** State Fire School June 12-13, 2026  
**LOCATION:** Lake Area Technical College Campus, Student Services Center, 1201 Arrow Avenue, Watertown, SD

### TENTATIVE AGENDA:

Call to Order & Opening Comments – Friday, June 12th, 730am CST  
S DFA Financial Reports & Audit  
Introduction of S DFA President candidates  
S DFA Updates

Reconvene Saturday, June 13th, 430pm – LATC-SSC  
Membership Comments and Concerns  
S DFA Business  
Honors and Awards

Elections for S DFA President will take place on Saturday, June 13th.  
Polling from 10:00am-2:00pm cst.  
Must be an S DFA member to vote.



### Hinkle celebrates anniversary

Congratulations to State Fire Marshal Doug Hinkle who celebrated his 20th anniversary with the State of South Dakota this month. Doug was presented a 20-year pin from DPS Secretary Bob Perry.



### Martin business fire

Martin Volunteer Fire Department was called out Easter morning to a structure fire at Okini Market.

### ACTION FIRE PHOTOS NEEDED!

Please send them to [jeff@southdakotafirefighter.com](mailto:jeff@southdakotafirefighter.com) along with information to explain the photo.

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>



### Johnson Siding responds to two separate calls

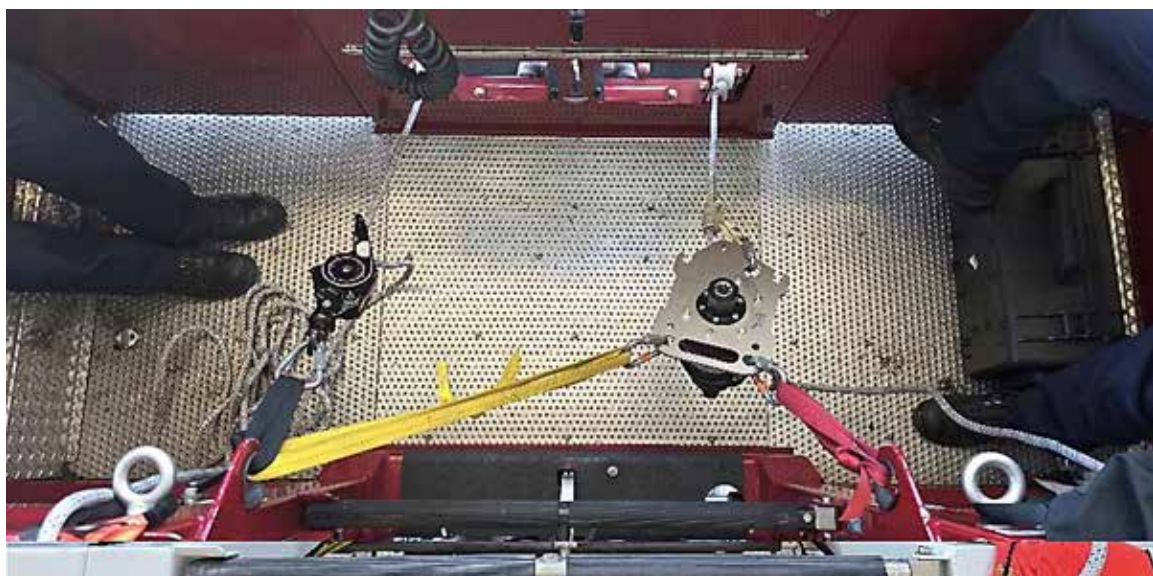
Johnson Siding Fire Department was called out April 16 for two separate but simultaneous incidents off Highway 44 West. The first call involved a dump truck vs. powerline near Shields Road and Highway 44. The dump truck operator was trapped in the cab of the vehicle for a short time until proper authorities could ensure the powerline was no longer energized. Thankfully that person had no injuries. The second scene involved a fire off of Log Porch Road that had the potential to threaten structures. Firefighters quickly stopped forward progress and spent considerable time mopping up. There were numerous hotspots where heat was trapped in the dry, peat-like duff inside the fire's perimeter which required hand work to expose and water to cool. South Dakota state investigators have taken over determining cause. We appreciate our mutual aid partners for assisting us in keeping this incident very small, and our fabulous Pennington County 911 Dispatchers for coordinating the information and agencies during these two incidents. From the Johnson Siding Fire Department Facebook page.

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>



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# Speccking Apparatus for Technical Rescue Success

Aerial rope system components to consider when ordering a new ladder truck

By CAPTAIN PATRICK O'BRIEN

Aerial apparatus have come along way over the years with regard to their capabilities such as weight capacities, tip loads, turning radius, etc. Another aspect that has evolved are parts and specialized components specific to a rescue evolution that are deemed technical rescue in nature. One of these evolutions is commonly called an aerial stokes or aerial pick-off. This evolution requires rope suspended by the aerial itself in some fashion that allows for a victim and/or rescuer to access and extricate from places otherwise difficult or impossible by means of traditional ground operations. This type of evolution has been somewhat controversial depending on what part of the country, department, or culture you belong to. I have found that there appears to be two schools of thought on this.

One, it is inherently too risky as the apparatus was manufactured with relatively low tip load capacities (250-500lb) and any rope systems introduced to the aerial can increase the risk of exceeding those tip loads.

Two, departments have ordered apparatus with tip loads that can support an increased load which lends itself to the idea of suspending a victim and rescuer without exceeding the tip load.

I have found that if option two has been identified, aerial rope system ideas often start to develop as members start to look for ways to use the aerial for specific evolutions to overcome those "what if" call types. We call this being visited by the "good idea fairy" which has been known to produce some very suspect rigging to overcome a lack of specific equipment that could've been specified in the aerial build.

Many manufacturers will listen to your requests throughout the speccking process and point you in the direction of equipment and engineering that has been done previously by other departments. This is a good thing to listen to, as many departments have asked for specific equipment for very specific rope rescue evolutions. If the manufacturer is offering and recommending these add-ons, then chances are they have been vetted by their engineers and they work!

One example of a specialized piece of equipment, is a rope anchor crossmember made by some apparatus manufacturers for their straight frames and tiller aerials, it is removable and is specifically designed for anchoring rope systems on top of the turntable. (Fig 1) This system demands that rope be used

on top of the ladder vs underneath which produces less tip load influence keeping the operation safer. The other piece of equipment that is almost a necessity if using this crossmember is a manufacturer supplied tip roller. (Fig 2) This pulley reduces friction and has a large DD ratio (Pulley, sheave ratios (Pitch Diameter of Sheave / Diameter of Rope) determining bending stress, fatigue life, and efficiency, with higher ratios (e.g. 18:1) to (40:1) reducing premature rope failure. ASME standards often require minimums (e.g., (15:1) to (18:1) for cranes, while smaller ratios increase bending fatigue and reduce lifespan. This along with introducing a force multiplier at the tip is typically why we don't recommend rigging your own anchor and small 1.5" to 2" pulleys for changes of direction. These manufacturers supplied items are the "go to" way of securing proficiency and safety for a rope-based system on your aerial and MUST be specified at premanufacturing meetings. Most manufacturers will not approve or satisfy any retro work after the apparatus has been delivered.

There are ways to safely overcome these oversights if you are working off an older aerial with a tip load that your department deems safe for rope based aerial operations. Depending on the manufacturer, a tip roller type of apparatus or similar may be a bolt-on option, but you will be hard pressed to get approval for a welder to come out to create the brackets needed to hold an anchor crossmember. Creative rigging will be needed to supply a safe and efficient anchor system that does not put the apparatus or any of its components at risk. For many years departments have rigged this system off of the last rung of the bed section stating that the manufacturer has "rated" the rung at 500 lbs. This may be true, but it introduces many issues such as rope running over the aggressive anti-skid footing material applied to most aerial rungs. Recent adaptations have moved this system up to the handrails to eliminate this problem which intern has raised another. Are the handrails rated? The straightforward answer is no. However, after doing some load calculations with regard to applied force seen at the anchors given a two person NFPA Rescue Load of 600 lbs, some deem it acceptable and safe. (Fig 3) However you will probably never get a "rating" on the handrails that gives you the green light for rope rescue rigging. The ability to rig ropes over

SEE SPECS, PAGE 11

## Specs FROM PAGE 10

the aerial rungs and move away from the traditional paradigm of under the rungs using the aerial as a high point change of direction has made rope rescue utilizing the aerial apparatus safer with regard to tip load deviation and overload.

Another unique aerial based rope system modification is gaining popularity with the Tower Ladder community. Again, it is based on the premise of "rope over rungs" reducing any force multiplier applied during an artificial high directional operation (rigging pulleys to the bottom of the platform and running ropes through as a change of direction). Typically these apparatus have a higher tip load rating (1000lbs) and may be able to safely pull off this style of rope rescue, however by anchoring back to the apparatus itself or to the ground, the introduction of the force multiplier takes effect solely based on the interior angle of the rope running through the change of direction (i.e. the interior angle is acute at 45°, the tip load deviation force equals 185%) this means that the platform is seeing 185lbs given a 100lb load. Or in real life, a 500lb load of an attendant and victim with stokes basket and gear will equal 925lbs, almost maxing out the rated capacity of the platform. To eliminate this, anchor brackets were specced to the rear of the platform and guide pulleys on the tip of the bucket. The team can now rig all rope systems from within the platform, reducing any chance of a force multiplier as well as allowing 360° of bearing angle or lateral movement without being limited by the rope anchored to the chassis or ground. (Fig 4)

Other rescue centric prebuilt equipment and accessories should be considered in your apparatus specification based on your demographic. A couple of these accessories, receiver hitches and tow eyes, can fulfill the need for anchors systems and winch applications. Pre-specced receivers can be called out for almost every side of the apparatus and welded at the factory with an associated rating, typically 9,000 lbs. Now, they still won't give you an NFPA rating, however the AHJ (authority having jurisdiction) may deem it acceptable within their SOGs to use the receiver with a rope anchor style insert. Another option is to add the use of a 12 Volt Winch mounted to a hitch or commercially made hitch mount. The hitch mount with winch can stay coupled and easily removed and stored in a compartment. A very simple and economical addition if you are using this style of mounting is to have a receptacle hard wired into a place that is easily accessed by the 12 V lead from the winch. Anderson Powerpole Connectors are typical heavy duty quick link style attachments for power and can easily be mounted in a compartment out of the elements. (Fig 5)

Whether on a ladder, engine or heavy rescue, taking the time to research and investigate pre-installed components that are conducive to future rescue accessories may pay dividends down the road for quick and proficient rescue systems.

These components have changed some rescue evolution designs and simplified the number of components needed as well as their set up times. All this leads to quicker evolution times, safer operations and unique standard operating procedures. Yes, these custom options will cost more at the factory, however in the grand scheme of cost per apparatus, they are a small price to pay for quicker, more efficient customer service.

### AUTHOR BIO

*Patrick O'Brien, Captain, is a 24-year fire service veteran and training officer with Puget Sound Fire and the South King County Fire Training Consortium overseeing ladder truck operations and technical rescue. He is an instructor with Rescue 3 International, member of the International Society of Fire Service Instructors, former Rescue Specialist with WATF-1 US&R, and co-founder of the training group KD Rescue. Patrick recently co-developed and launched the online databases and associated websites [www.technicalrescuesurvey.com](http://www.technicalrescuesurvey.com) and [www.waterrescuesurvey.com](http://www.waterrescuesurvey.com) both free online reporting databases designed to help find trends in technical rescue incidents. O'Brien also developed and authored the South King County's aerial opera-*

*tor program and Aerial Dynamics user manual and has been at the forefront of training prop development. With a background in small business development, technical drawing, illustration, and fabrication, O'Brien helped co-invent the SVT (Submerged Vehicle Trainer) a vehicle-in-water simulator for Swiftwater Rescue and Rescue Swimmer Operations.*



## Fair City Conference

Another district school is in the books with the Fair City Fireman's Conference on April 4 Great day be challenged on being a leader in the fire service. Logan Watts and Ljay Geist brought some great stuff to the group. From the Huron Fire Department Facebook page.

# S DFA 2026 Fire School Classes

**Advanced Vehicle Rescue/Extrication Available:** Friday & Saturday  
**Hours:** 8 Hours

This class will cover advanced vehicle extrication using struts, cribbing, hand tools and hydraulic tools. Heavy rescue techniques will be demonstrated and performed. Students will be doing lots of cutting and heavy work. Scenarios with semi-trailers, heavy farm equipment, tractors and lots of tunneling into cars. Be prepared for who-knows-what type of accidents you might be working. Students should have the basic vehicle extrication completed. PPE- full structure or rescue gear including helmet, steel toed boots, gloves, eye protection.

**Bad Leaders, Inherited Teams, and The Wrong People in The Right Positions Available:** Friday AM & Saturday AM  
**Hours:** 4 Hours

We all have different descriptions of what good leadership is but we can all agree upon what bad leadership feels like. What do we do when we are working for a bad leader. How to we navigate, influence, and still affect change when we have all the responsibility to execute on orders without the input on when, why, and how. What about an organization who has the incorrect person in a mission critical position, “wrong person, right seat?” Do they still have value and who is responsible for their actions? What about inheriting a team we did not choose? Do we want the members on that team? Or better yet, do they even want us? Building on the 2024 CPSE session Failure in you KSA's: Idle Ignorance is Limiting your Organization, this session will actively engage the members through discussion and real-world incidents to understand why how we can use influence, feedback, confrontation, and crucial candor to affect change. (Missed the 2024 session? No worries, this session will catch you up.) Understand how self-leadership plays a role in bad leaders

**Basic Vehicle Extrication Available:** Friday & Saturday  
**Hours:** 8 Hours

This course provides basics hands-on training for fire and rescue personnel in size-up, stabilization, hazard control, patient access, disentanglement, and scene control techniques at automobile accidents. The course will begin with a PowerPoint presentation & classroom discussion. This classroom section will cover the different types of vehicles which rescuers may encounter and the techniques employed for a successful rescue. The afternoon portion of the class will focus on hands-on training utilizing various extrication tools and techniques. Emphasis is placed on proper choice, placement, and use of equipment available locally. 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.

**Building the Fire Officer Available:** Saturday  
**Hours:** 8 Hours

This course is designed for the modern-day fire service officer (or those who may work in that role) performing as the supervisor of a fire ground company or crew. The course will provide the student with an understanding of leadership concepts, coaching the best performance out of their crew and creating a task driven fire company that functions in a safe and efficient manner. Building the Fire Officer will help your organization to identify and develop the individuals that will become the officers of tomorrow. Class Limit - 26

**Certified Fire Instructors Class Available:** Friday & Saturday  
**Hours:** 16 Hours (Two-Day)

The South Dakota Certified Fire Instructor course prepares future instructors to train members of their own organization as well as traveling to other departments. This course begins with pre-course work at home, plus one weekend of classroom study and presentations.

**Emergency Vehicle Operator Course - EVOC Available:** Friday & Saturday  
**Hours:** 8 Hours

Every responder hopes they will never be involved in an accident when responding to an emergency. This class and driving course will help to show you what's involved while responding with lights and siren. It may also help if the tragic happens and your driving record is called into question. Completing a recognized EVOC class will give you some information on “where to start” with driving first response vehicles. Emergency Vehicle Operator Course (EVOC) is a classroom and hands-on class that teaches first responders the necessary skills to operate an emergency vehicle safely. We will cover the basic plus more in the class. Bring sunglasses and be prepared to drive the course! HIPPA is also offered as a part of this course, as patient privacy is a big part of our first responder world. This will also get you another step closer to completing your checklist for the SD Ambulance Driver Competencies if you may need to drive an Ambulance. Class Limit - 24

**Fire and the Media 101: What to Say when You're in the Hot Seat Available:** Friday AM & Saturday AM  
**Hours:** 4 Hours

Participants in this hands-on class will learn how to prepare for a media interview including formulating great answers and building confidence in front of the camera. Use what you learn practicing in mock interview scenarios to be ready for the real deal. From writing press releases to posting on social media, participants will take away templates, tips and strategies

for succeeding with the media.

**Firefighting Essentials Available:** Saturday  
**Hours:** 8 Hours

Get ready for an action packed fire training experience. This hands-on class puts you right in the middle of live fire scenarios, real world vehicle extrication, ladder throws, hydrant hookups and general ventilation techniques. Whether you're brand new to the job or a seasoned firefighter, you'll sharpen your skills, try new techniques and train alongside others who love the craft. Instructors keep it fast-paced and practical, and if there's something you want to work on we'll try and make it happen. No lectures, no fluff- just real training, real fire, and a full day doing the job we're passionate about.

**Flashover Simulator/Live Fire Training Available:** Friday & Saturday  
**Hours:** 8 Hours

This trailer lets the firefighter witness the awesome life cycle of an unfriendly fire from ignition to flashover. Learn to recognize the conditions leading to Flashover—how it happens, how to recognize the rapidly developing fire, dense smoke, high heat, and rollover which are all present in the unit. Learn to use defensive techniques. Who would send a Firefighter to face a situation in the real world that he has not seen in training? – Students must be competent in nozzle operation and SCBA usage. PPE: Full Structural PPE and SCBA, spare Cylinder Recommended Class Limit - 30

**Grain Entrapment / Rescue Available:** Friday & Saturday  
**Hours:** 8 Hours

Students will be provided with information from size up to termination of a grain bin incident, including the number of rescuers needed and the dangers that grain bins present to rescuers. PPE/Equipment Requirements: Light PPE (Gloves & Helmet) & Safety Glasses Student Prerequisites: NONE. Class Limit: 25

**Halligan Tools & Digital Rules: A Fire Dept's Guide to Social Media and AI Available:** Friday PM & Saturday PM  
**Hours:** 4 Hours

This practical class is built for firefighters of any age or experience level —anyone who wants to make the most of their department's social media page(s.) We'll cover the do's and don'ts of social media, including responsible posting, and engaging with your local audience in ways that build trust and support. You'll also get hands-on guidance using simple tools for graphic design basics and modern Artificial Intelligence (AI) like ChatGPT and image generators to help create posts that look professional and get noticed. Whether you're promoting a pancake feed, sharing safety tips, or boosting turnout at your next fundraiser, this class will help your depart-

ment stand out online and connect more effectively with your community. People with any level of tech experience are welcome, you just need the willingness to learn!

**Limits: Leadership Lessons Command and Control Will Not Teach You Available:** Friday PM & Saturday PM  
**Hours:** 4 Hours

You have been trained your whole career to lead by command and control. On the fireground you have perfected this leadership style yet you are finding that you do not have the same results leading the organization. Our world around us has changed but our leadership style has not. The Hard Skills learned during emergency operations does not translate into the Soft Skills required to lead people. We can no longer lead our organizations from an “I say, you do” mentality. With multiple generations working in our departments and a changing desire for work as a whole, we must lead through Influence and Inspiration. Understanding that through our members, we can innovate, collaborate, and create a belonging based on why we exist. This session will actively engage the members through discussion and real-world incidents to understand why we must shift our leadership, the barriers we will encounter, and how to be an Influential and Inspiring Leader. OBJ: • Understand the leadership change of command and control to influence and inspire • Identify the barriers and resistance we will meet and how to walk through them • Act on the steps to become an influential and Inspiring leader

**Lithium-Ion Battery Fires-An Overview Available:** Friday  
**Hours:** 8 Hours

In this course, we present information on battery chemistries and construction/architecture, as well as emerging applications where responders may encounter this technology. We also examine what occurs when lithium-ion batteries are exposed to fire, either directly or indirectly. The course further proposes and demonstrates a range of fire suppression techniques for effective response and mitigation. In addition, we discuss remediation processes that can be implemented once a fire has been successfully controlled and extinguished. The hands-on demonstration portion of the course includes live fire suppression scenarios involving operational lithium-ion batteries. During these scenarios, batteries are intentionally driven into thermal runaway and extinguished using various suppression techniques. After each burn, we examine and discuss the actions taken, along with the components identified in each battery system. Finally, the course covers on-scene operational considerations, with a focus on exposure reduction through appropriate on-scene decontamination techniques.

**Modern Strategies and Tactics for House Fires Available:** Saturday  
**Hours:** 8 Hours

House fires are our most important alarm. House fires cause 75% of American fire fatalities and are where firefighters are injured/killed. This program will sharpen your tactical knowledge and skills to make you more effective fire officer or firefighter at your next house fire. Topics included are: nozzle techniques for aggressive fire attack, engine set up for rapid attack, search and rescue strategies and a review of critical tactical considerations resulting from \$20 million of UL research in residential fires. Case histories of actual successful and unsuccessful fire attack highlight the program. This training updates your tactics for aggressive search and rescue and fire attack for basement fires, first and second floor fires and attic fires.

**Moral and Spiritual Injury: Implications for First Responders Available:** Friday & Saturday  
**Hours:** 16 Hours (Two-Day)

Moral injury (MI) refers to the enduring psychosocial and spiritual harms that can result from exposure to situations or events that occur in high stakes situations that involve transgression of one's deeply held moral convictions of right and wrong, and perceived betrayal by those in positions of authority. First responders are routinely, asked to make life and death decisions in the course of their career. This class covers the distinction between moral and spiritual injuries, and other stress related injuries, how to assess such injuries, and ways to address such injuries. This class is particularly relevant to chaplains, peer support, mental health, and leadership.

**National Fire Academy Course F0770 – Fire Investigation: First Responder Available:** Friday & Saturday  
**Hours:** 16 Hours (Two-Day)

This 2-day course presents a basic overview of a fire investigation. Students will review the basics of fire chemistry and develop an understanding of the role of the first responder in relation to fire suppression and fire investigation. The course will stress the importance of fire scene awareness, evidence identification, preservation and the basics of a fire investigation. Students will develop an appreciation for the convergence of suppression, investigation, science and law.

**NERIS/Incident Reports Available:** Friday PM  
**Hours:** 4 Hours

Emergency Incident Reporting for the United States, including the State of South Dakota Fire Departments, are changing. A new system is being developed by the Fire Safety Research Institute (FSRI), part of UL Research Institutes, in Collaboration with the United States Fire Administration

# S DFA 2026 Fire School Classes

(USFA). This new system is called NERIS (National Emergency Response Information System) and it is replacing the legacy NFIRS (National Fire Incident Reporting System) as the primary reporting tool for fire and emergency response. Information will be shared on how your department can prepare for this modernization. What current incident information you need to save and backup, and a look into how to do incident reports in the future. All SD fire departments will eventually be onboarded onto the new system, some fire departments may be onboarded anytime in 2025 and every fire department will need to start using it beginning of January 2026.

## No Gimmicks Handline Management

**Available:** Friday & Saturday  
**Hours:** 8 Hours  
Often, we are taught how to pull the hose and hit the fire, but not taught everything in between. This class will include handline management and proper body mechanics, as well as hose advancement techniques with an emphasis on limited staffing scenarios. Students will learn to combine their knowledge of fire behavior, water application and hose advancement to achieve rapid extinguishment. The hands-on training site will simulate a common layout found during interior attack. Full structural firefighting PPE (excluding SCBA) required. This will be a physically demanding "all day" class. A high level of physical fitness is recommended. Attendees will be expected to have working knowledge of and comfort with PPE and SCBA. This class is appropriate for all levels of experience and rank. Over the past 4 years, this Class has been taught to over 300 firefighters in the state of South Dakota. Register and come see what all the fuss is about!

## Operational Decision Making - From the Chief to the Back Seat

**Available:** Friday AM, Friday PM, Saturday AM & Saturday PM  
**Hours:** 4 Hours  
When the tones go off, the clock starts. The public expects us to respond quickly, operate efficiently, and make the right decisions under pressure. This course focuses on how to operate effectively and decisively on the fireground—from the Incident Commander to the firefighter on the nozzle. Drawing from research and proven best practices, including UL Fire Safety Research Institute (UL FSRI), Mastering Fireground Command, the Firefighter Rescue Survey, and other sources, this class breaks down fireground operations in a practical, actionable way. We will talk about: What needs to be done Why it needs to be done When and how it should be executed Tactics will be discussed at every operational level, ensuring clarity in roles, responsibilities, and expectations. Once core tactics are understood, we will focus on prioritization and decision making under varying staffing conditions. Some

departments have the manpower to perform multiple fireground functions simultaneously, while others must operate sequentially. This course addresses how to prioritize effectively based on your department's resources and response capabilities. Participants will conclude the class by working through multiple simulated fireground scenarios tailored to their own department's staffing and response model, reinforcing practical application and operational confidence.

## PUMP OPERATIONS

**Available:** Friday AM, Friday PM, Saturday AM & Saturday PM  
**Hours:** 4 Hours  
This is an operations class for all levels from beginner to advanced. During the classroom portion of the class, students will learn why handlines and hose lays are pumped at designed pressures. They will learn how to react to emergency situations that happen on a fireground, such as a kinked or ruptured line. They will also learn how to figure friction loss. Students will be taught how to operate both electronic pressure governors and pressure relief valve type control systems. Students will then conduct hands-on training on a fire engine to see how to recognize situations that are happening on the hose lines. There will also be discussions on relay pumping, static and pressurized water supplies. Class Limit - 12

## Reading Smoke for Tactical Decision Making

**Available:** Friday AM, Friday PM, Saturday AM & Saturday PM  
**Hours:** 4 Hours  
Using the concepts of "reading smoke" developed by Dave Doddson, students will learn to recognize, predict, and prevent hostile fire events and determine where the fire is, where it is not, and where it is going next. Students will also be challenged to understand decision making and how recognition prime decision making affects our ability to act on the fire ground. All of this will lead to the primary course objective, making tactical decisions to reduce life safety concerns, lead to incident stabilization, and preserve as much property as possible.

## Reading the Building: Building FACTS and Size-up on Main Streets

**Available:** Friday & Saturday  
**Hours:** 8 Hours  
Reading the Building: Building FACTS and Size-up on Main Streets; Watertown, SD Returning again in 2026; Presenting the signature Reading the Buildings program taking the classroom to the streets with insights on building construction for today's fire service, this program increases awareness and understandings to promote new skill sets in the fundamentals of building size-up, risk assessments and construction that directly impact firefighting and command operations at structure fires. This unique program will consist of a walking tour

on select streets and within various buildings in downtown Watertown; Reading Buildings, developing size-up skills while looking at a variety of building types, occupancies, risks and vintage-eras of structures, all while discussing operations, risks and building hazards with curb side conversation. The program will start with a morning classroom lecture incorporating the Buildings on fire FACTS concept for First-Arriving Construction, Tactics and Safety looking at integrate tactical risks and key considerations for the First-Due Company, Company Officer and Commander affecting and influencing operational risk management, with benchmarks, tactical window protocols based upon occupancy risks, building reads/size-up and adaptive management principles. Followed by the afternoon facilitated walking tour and curb-side conversations on the Streets of Watertown looking at a variety of building types, discussing operations, risks and building hazards with curb-side conversation. This program is for all ranks and experience levels.

## Rope Rescue, Advanced

**Available:** Saturday  
**Hours:** 8 Hours  
NOTE: YOU SHOULD HAVE TAKEN PART 1 AND/OR HAVE GOOD WORKING COMPETENT SKILLS IN ROPE RESCUE AND HAUL SYSTEMS If you choose to continue your rope rescue education you may sign up for PART 2. This will be a more advanced technician level day (the guy hanging on the rope). We also encourage those who do not plan on hanging from a harness, but wish to learn the process to sign up as well. This course will cover skills that range from Harness familiarization to rappelling off of Watertown Fire Rescue's 40' high hose tower. We will also cover patient packaging using a stokes basket. We hope to see you there! PPE Requirements: Helmet, Gloves, Boots Class Limit 10

## Rope Rescue, Basic

**Available:** Friday  
**Hours:** 8 Hours  
The course he will be teaching will be separated into two classes of eight-hour days, if you wish to take both PART 1 AND PART 2 make sure you register for BOTH! PART 2 Shouldn't be taken unless you have taken PART 1 AND/OR have a good working knowledge of ropes, knots and haul systems. Both days will contain a vast majority of hands on skills. PART 1 will feature a high amount of operations level skills and information. Keep in mind most of this training will be at ground level. During this time, we will cover everything the ground level technician needs to know (the guy who isn't going over the edge). It will cover everything from basic NFPA standard overviews to lowering systems and haul systems using mechanical advantage. PPE Requirements: Helmet, Gloves, Boots Class Limit - 20

## Rural Firefighting Tactics

**Available:** Friday  
**Hours:** 8 Hours

This course is an informational discussion of the "New" fire chemistry, a review of hostile fire events, descriptions of the on-going NIST/ UL studies, and the attack methodology that can be used to solve the problems that arise in the rural and urban settings of today's fire ground. Focus will be placed on water supply and the first 10 minutes of on-scene actions at a working structure fire. This offering is for any rank within the fire service that deals with suppression duties, especially interior attack fire personnel and command officers. The overall focus of this class is to show the need for fire ground commanders to re-evaluate what tactics are being used by their personnel during initial attack operations. This course meets components of the NFPA 1021 Standard.

## Rural Success: Winning With The Engine You Have, Not The Engine You Want

**Available:** Friday AM & Saturday AM  
**Hours:** 4 Hours

Building the perfect engine for your department is a challenge that many would love the opportunity to solve! Unfortunately, the opportunity is rarely afforded to departments operating in rural environments. Many rural departments operate with rigs that are 15, 20, or even 30-plus years old. These rigs may have been purchased new by the department, but it's also common for them to have been built for another department and then purchased used or donated to the current department. In both cases, departments are using rigs that were purpose-built for another department/jurisdiction, or built for their department's needs 20 or more years ago. Regardless of the situation, the expectation is that we perform with the equipment we have! This class will examine the necessary equipment, strategies and mindset to win with the equipment we have in the rural fire environment. Students will leave class with proven concepts they can take back to their departments to enhance fire attack and water supply training, efficiency, and capabilities.

## Rural Water Supply Operations

**Available:** Friday & Saturday  
**Hours:** 8 Hours

This one-day class focuses on the best practices of hauling water with tenders for structural fire fighting operations. Split between 4 hours of classroom review and 4-hours of practical skill work, the class reviews topics such as fire flow demand, types of water hauling vehicles, rural hitch operations, dump tank operations, fill site operations, and water shuttle considerations. Practical exercises include work on nurse tanker, dump site operations, and water shuttles set-up.

## SCBA Confidence Course

**Available:** Friday & Saturday

**Hours:** 8 Hours

This class is a down and dirty basic firefighter confidence class. We start out slow by just getting comfortable moving in the gear and slowly adding survival skill sets. By the end of the day, you will be crawling through a multi-level maze built into the basement of the WFR smoke house. We will find and test your limits while wearing full PPE and SCBA. While this course is designed for newer firefighters, all skill levels are welcome and encouraged. PPE Required: Full Bunker Gear including SCBA. An additional air tank would be helpful. Class Limit - 15

## S DFA MLFTU - SENIOR Live Fire Instructor

**Available:** Friday  
**Hours:** 8 Hours

Participants must have a minimum 3 years of experience as a SD or other Accredited Fire Service Instructor and must be a current member of the South Dakota Society of Fire Service Instructors. Class will be roughly 16 hours in length.

## Shaping Your Volunteer Fire Department to Fit Today's Expectations

**Available:** Friday PM & Saturday PM  
**Hours:** 4 Hours

Is your Volunteer fire department struggling to maintain relevance in our changing society? Does your current service delivery model meet the needs and expectations of your community? Are you struggling to recruit, train, and retain members? Each day, it seems the news feeds contain a story about a volunteer department closing its doors, facing financial trouble, or, worse, legal trouble. There appears to be widespread panic about the critical shortage of volunteers. Does it have to be this way? In this class, we will examine how industry and societal trends impact today's volunteer fire service, take a hard look at the way we've always done it, as well as share and develop alternative ways to recruit, market, lead, train, and manage our departments and members.

## TIMS-Train the Trainer

**Available:** Saturday  
**Hours:** 8 Hours

The National Traffic Incident Management (TIMS) Responder Train-the-Trainer program is a Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) sponsored initiative designed to certify instructors to teach the TIMS Responder Training Course. It focuses on safe, quick clearance techniques, multi-disciplinary coordination, and enhancing responder safety, aiming to train 1.3 responders nationwide.

## Traffic Incident Management, TIMS

**Available:** Friday AM & Friday PM  
**Hours:** 4 Hours

TIMS Traffic Incident Management System, TIMS will help in the coordinated response of multi agencies, and clear traffic incidents so that traffic flow may be restored as safely and quickly as possible.

# SDFA 2026 Fire School Classes

If done right TIMS will reduce the time and length the incident has on other motorists, victims involved and emergency personnel that are on scene, allowing you to get home safe to your families.

**Truckless Available:** Friday & Saturday  
**Hours:** 16 Hours  
 Every fireground requires critical engine and truck company tasks, yet most departments operate without dedicated truck companies. Truckless Truckie is a two-day, hands-on class designed to teach firefighters how to efficiently and aggressively perform these essential functions with limited staffing from an engine company. Day

1 focuses on core truck company skills including forcible entry, search techniques, victim removal, ground ladder operations, and improving fireground efficiency and tempo. Day 2 puts those skills to the test in live fire scenarios, exposing participants to realistic heat, smoke, and progressively challenging conditions. This is a physically and mentally demanding course, and participants should arrive well-rested, hydrated, and ready to push themselves. A minimum FF1 certification (or equivalent) is required, along with full structural PPE including SCBA (spare cylinder recommended). Participants must be clean shaven for Day 2 to ensure proper mask fit, and anyone not meeting re-

quirements will not be allowed to participate in live fire evolutions.

**Volunteer Fire Department Available:** Friday AM  
**Hours:** 4 Hours  
 This Class will be an overview and discussion about the laws, standards and ordinances specifically pertaining to the fire service. Laws, standards and ordinances promulgated at the federal, state and some local levels. Recommended for those personnel that are in management positions with fire department operations, fire prevention/code enforcement or those that deal with building fire and life safety issues as well as the up-and-coming firefighting officers.

**You Don't Know What You Don't Know About Gas Leaks Available:** Friday  
**Hours:** 8 Hours  
 You don't know what you don't know about gas leaks. This training is based on what I did not know that almost killed me when the routine gas leak caused the house to explode, nearly killing me while operating with my volunteer FD. Natural gas and propane emergencies are very dangerous alarms. Our training and SOPs are often weak so gas emergencies don't get the respect they require until a response goes bad. Bring your departments 4 gas meter and/or your combustible gas detector for hands on use in our table top explosion

chamber to help you understand its uses and limitations. This fast paced class is practical, hands on, interactive, fact filled, reality based, back to basics program that covers what fire officers and firefighters need to know about natural gas and propane emergencies. Focus is on our mission of life safety for civilians, protection of our members using the kill box concept and tactical use of sweeping search procedures in very dangerous conditions. Take homes from this program include: understanding your current gas detector, FD use of new laser gas detectors, new tactics/strategies and sample/model SOPs. Class Limit - 26



## Castlewood FD training

Castlewood Fire Department posted some photos from recent training on their Facebook page.

# FDNY Adopts Tactical Changes Per UL Research

By JERRY KNAPP

## WHAT?

While reading WNYF magazine (excellent FDNY publication) I came across an article called *The Anatomy of Extreme Fire Behavior*. It is applicable to every fire officer and firefighter in the world today. It showed how UL (Underwriters Laboratory) and FDNY worked together to understand how a kitchen fire in an H type apartment raced up the interior stairs and extended 15' thru the roof bulk head door. You don't have an H type 6 story apartment in your district? The concept of flow path described in the article and from a really dangerous fire scenario applies to house fires and all types of fires in buildings.

The fire described in the article was a success story and not a review of a multiple LODD (Watts St fire 3 LODD was on previous pages) because officers and members at this recent fire understood fire dynamics. Specifically: flow paths, low intake, high exhaust (LIHE), unidirectional and bidirectional flows and effect of ventilation on fire conditions. Understanding these terms and fire ground conditions they represent/create are critical for fire officers to apply proper strategy and tactics...and protect your members. Understanding of fire dynamics is critical for all Firefighters to recognize conditions so you can prevent becoming another LODD

and protect the members of your department. It happens really fast in the fire building so if you don't react immediately it is likely you will become a LODD.

FDNY has applied the UL research and modernized FDNY fire attack tactics and strategies. You should too. The UL research based on facts and data from live burns of both test and acquired structures and reconstruction of previous LODD fires like Cherry Road (1999). ULs work is mainly focused on house fires. Residential fires account for 75% of loss of civilian lives every year. House fires are our most important alarm and what we must fully understand for our safety and theirs.

## SO WHAT?

Here are a couple quotes from the article for you to consider.

*"In generations past, most FDNY members didn't possess the vocabulary of physics and fire dynamics. But that has changed. In 2008, a large group of FDNY members including BC Jerry Tracy and several scientists from NIST, including Daniel Madzykowski and Stephen Kerber, ushered in the fire-dynamics era by conducting a series of live burn experiments on NYC's Governor's Island."*

Later in the same paragraph, WNYF continues...

*"Then in 2021, the FDNY issued an official document titled "Training Bulletin - Fire Dynamics" drawing on fire science research*

*conducted by UL Fire Safety Research Institute and expanding upon the FDNYs fire dynamics knowledge base. Today you commonly hear FDNY members using words like "flow path." They speak the language."*

## NOW WHAT?

We mentioned 2 important fires where there were multiple LODDs. First, Cherry Road, Washington DC in 1999. It was 25 years ago and we must learn from

it. What started as a fire in a ceiling fan took the lives of 2 firefighters and ended the career of a third due to severe burns. Here is a tactical change, fight the basement fire at its level if possible. Don't crawl down the chimney aka interior stairs unless you absolutely have to. Dan Madzykowski proved through recreating the fire, it traveled up the steps at nearly 20 miles per hours. Two veteran firefighters never had a chance in that flow path aka blow torch. You should

read his magnificent report. Study this important fire that occurred 25 years ago.

The Watts Street fire is a real life case history of what we need to know about fire dynamics. Tactical change: we need to understand low intake and high exhaust and flow paths that can develop at every fire. Study this fire.

Here is some additional great training.

TRAINING AVAILABE FROM FSRI.ORG

## Fire burns over 5,000 east Custer county acres

A rapidly-spreading fire on the eastern side of Custer County torched 5,408 acres last weekend before forward progress on the fire was stopped. The 79 Fire three miles north of Buffalo Gap was reported around 11:35 a.m. on Saturday, April 11 2026 .

According to the South Dakota Department of Public Safety, it started just east of Hwy. 79 along East French Creek Road in eastern Custer County. State, federal and local resources along with air support were on initial attack of the fire, which burned primarily grass. By 6:30 p.m. the night the fire started it was announced firefighters had stopped forward progress of the fire. It stretched an estimated six miles,

from Hwy. 79 to 144th Avenue in eastern Custer County.

No structures were lost in the fire. Area roads were temporarily closed, and the cause is listed as human-caused. Like the Qury Fire, the 79 Fire was strongly pushed by wind. Two large air tankers, two single-engine airtankers and one Type 1 helicopter were used to stop progress of the fire.

Gov. Larry Rhoden has declared a state of emergency for areas affected by the 79 Fire.

"Keeping South Dakotans safe is my number one priority, and this emergency declaration will provide the resources firefighters need to get control of this fire," Rhoden said. "I'm grateful for their dedication

and bravery in keeping everyone safe."

The emergency declaration allows fire suppression costs to be covered by the state fire suppression fund in accordance with SDCL 41-20A-8.

By Tuesday, the fire was 90 percent contained, and firefighters were mopping up around the fire perimeter and around values at risk. In the Lame Johnny Creek drainage there were still cottonwood trees putting off smoke within the burn site, fire officials said.

There were no injuries reported, and there were no structures lost.

## ADDITIONAL TRAINING RESOURCES

Cherry Road, a townhouse fire in Washington D.C. that claimed the lives of two firefighters, is an example of a low-intake, high-exhaust flow path scenario. Scan to watch the incident video.



<https://qrco.de/beoMkt>

Watch Adam Thiel, former Philadelphia Fire Commissioner, discuss tactical considerations to avoid getting caught in the flow path while fighting a basement

Review how wind direction can impact fire development and potentially jeopardize the safety of an advancing crew.



<https://qrco.de/beoMoF>

View the Understanding and Fighting Basement Fires Summary video to examine the dynamics of below-grade fires and explore the most effective research-based tactics for fighting them.



<https://qrco.de/beoFul>



<https://qrco.de/beoMml>

[training.fsri.org](https://training.fsri.org)

# DEPARTMENT MEMBERSHIPS

Aberdeen Fire & Rescue	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Elm Springs Fire Department	SDFA Department Only Membership
Aberdeen Rural Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Emery Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Academy Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Enning Fire Department	SDFA Department Only Membership
Agar Fire Department	SDFA Department Only Membership	Estelline Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Akaska Fire Department	SDFA Department Only Membership	Ethan Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Alcester Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Eureka Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Alexandria Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Fairburn Fire Department	SDFA Department Only Membership
Alpena Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Fairview Fire Department	SDFA Department Only Membership
Andover Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Faith Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Angostura Rural Volunteer FD	SDFA Department Only Membership	Faulkton Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Ardmore Fire Department	SDFA Department Only Membership	Flandreau Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Argyle Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Fort Pierre Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Armour Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Frederick Area Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Ashton Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Freeman Fire Department	SDFA Department Only Membership
Aurora Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Garden City Fire Department	SDFA Department Only Membership
Avon Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Garretson Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Badger Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Gary Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Belle Fourche Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Geddes Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Belvidere Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Gettysburg Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Beresford Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Glad Valley Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Big Stone City Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Glenham Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Bison Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Goodwin Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Black Hawk Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Grand River Fire Department	SDFA Department Only Membership
Blunt Rural Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Gregory Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Bonesteel Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Harold Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Bowdle Fire Department	SDFA Department Only Membership	Hartford Fire and Rescue	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Box Elder Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Hayti Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Bradley Fire Department	SDFA Department Only Membership	Hazel Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Brandon Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Hecla Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Brandt Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Herreid Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Brentford Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Highmore Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Bristol Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Hill City Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Brookings Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Hitchcock Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Brownsville Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Hosmer Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Bruce Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Hudson Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Burke Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Humboldt Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Camp Crook Fire Department	SDFA Department Only Membership	Hurley Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Canistota Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Huron Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Canova Fire Department	SDFA Department Only Membership	Hutterville Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Canton Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Interior Fire Department	SDFA Department Only Membership
Carthage Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Ipswich Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Cascade Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Irene Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Castle Rock Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Isabel Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Castlewood Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Jasper Fire Department	SDFA Department Only Membership
Cavour Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Java Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Centerville Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Jefferson Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Chamberlain Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Johnson Siding Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Chester Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Kadoka Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Claire City Fire Protection District	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Kimball Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Claremont Area Fire Protection Dist	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Kyle Fire Department	SDFA Department Only Membership
Clark Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Lake Preston Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Clear Lake Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Langford Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Colman Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Lebanon Fire Department	SDFA Department Only Membership
Colome Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Lemmon Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Colton Fire Rescue	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Lennox Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Columbia Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Leola Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Conde Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Lesterville Fire & Rescue Dept	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Corona Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Letcher Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Corsica Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Long Lake Fire Department	SDFA Department Only Membership
Cresbard Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Lyons Fire Department	SDFA Department Only Membership
Crooks Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Madison Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Custer Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Marion Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Dallas Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Martin Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Dante Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Mc Intosh Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
De Smet Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Mc Laughlin Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Deadwood Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Mellette Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Dell Rapids Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Menno Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Delmont Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Midland Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Doty Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Milbank Fire & Rescue	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Dupree Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Miller Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Eagle Butte Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Minnekahta Fire Department	SDFA Department Only Membership
Eden Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Mission Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Edgemont Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Mitchell Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Elk Point Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Mobridge Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership
Elkton Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership	Montrose Fire Department	SDFA 100% Department Membership



# State Farm® and the NVFC Increase Fire Department Readiness and Community Safety through \$1.5 Million Grant Program Butte VFD receives grant

State Farm and the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) annually team up to support local fire departments and increase community preparedness through the Good Neighbor Firefighter Safety Program. In 2025, a total of \$1.5 million was awarded in the form of \$10,000 grants to 150 volunteer fire departments across the U.S. These grants were used to purchase needed equipment that enables

firefighters to more safely and effectively respond to emergencies.

The majority of fire departments in the U.S. are staffed by volunteers, but many of these departments struggle to find funding for essential equipment and resources. The Good Neighbor Firefighter Safety Program launched in 2024 with \$1 million in grants to help local fire departments increase safety and efficiency and better serve

their communities. Due to the clear need for this funding, State Farm increased its commitment to \$1.5 million in 2025. State Farm also provided the first 2,000 applicants with one-year [NVFC memberships](#) to give them access to additional support, training, and resources.

### MORE EFFICIENT RESCUES

The Butte (SD) Volunteer Fire Department obtained specialty

tools and training to prepare their responders to engage in life saving rescue situations. With the extraction challenges that newer vehicles pose, it is critical that responders have the proper tools and training for vehicle rescues. “After purchasing these tools, our department was able to participate in two extrication training classes already this year, resulting in members getting valuable training and

becoming familiar with the tools and techniques needed to engage in real life rescue operations,” said Assistant Chief Jim Davis.

### GET READY FOR THE 2026 GOOD NEIGHBOR FIREFIGHTER SAFETY PROGRAM

In 2026, State Farm will provide an additional \$1.5 million in grants through the Good Neighbor Firefighter Safety Program. Eligible volunteer fire departments can apply for a \$10,000 grant to purchase equipment that will make a difference in their department and community.

The application period will be open from Monday, May 4 at noon Eastern to Thursday, May 7 at noon Eastern. Departments can get ready now by reading the criteria, application guidance, eligible items list, and frequently asked questions found at [www.nvfc.org/statefarm](http://www.nvfc.org/statefarm).

## South Dakota volunteer firefighters face growing recruitment challenges

We have already seen an early start to fire season with the Qury Fire and Coyote Flats Fire. Along with more than half a dozen smaller fires — they all had one thing in common: volunteer firefighters were first to respond.

Pennington County Fire Administrator Jerome Harvey says, “Volunteer fire departments in South Dakota are 96.6% of the South Dakota fire service. That’s second in the nation to the state of Delaware, and they are the backbone of the fire service, whether it’s here in South Dakota or across the United States. It really comes down to that volunteerism.”

But keeping those volunteers is becoming more difficult. Harvey says many firefighters are stepping away — as families struggle to make ends meet and prioritize full-time jobs.

Jerome Harvey says, “Back in the day, you might be the coach of the little league team. You might teach Sunday School. You might help out of the school on Friday night, coach basketball, whatever, and also man the volunteer fire department. And those days are really a thing of the past.”





As far as what can be done to retain recruits, Harvey says that counties have done all they can, now it’s up to the state to step in.

(KNBN-TV NBC 21, Rapid City, SD, April 7, 2026)



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26-0847

# Those in path of Qury Fire share experiences

By JASON FERGUSON

Tom and Linda Wilson were sitting at their Deer Meadow Road home the afternoon of March 12, when suddenly the power went out. “Not again,” Tom muttered to himself.

Tom went to his back deck to see if he could spot a reason for the power outage. When he stepped outside, he smelled smoke.

He went back inside and told his wife he smelled smoke. The two went back outside onto the deck, and this time, the two could see a plume of smoke rising from behind the slope that is behind their home.

Less than two minutes later the flames, pushed by the wind, were crawling toward their home. “I said, ‘this is bad,’” he said. “With the wind... the fire was coming right at us.”

The two turned back into the house, and got ready to evacuate. The two had contemplated such a day, and as such, already had go bags out in the garage that contained clothing and other essential items in case they had to stay somewhere else for a while.

They also contained important documents. With those in hand, they jumped in the car and headed away from their home.

As they left they saw the first fire equipment arriving. June Johnston was also home when the Qury Fire and Deer Fire began. She was in her kitchen when her dog began “barking her brains out.”

She went to see what the issue was, and from her front room window saw a large smoke cloud.

She called 911 to report the fire, with dispatch saying it already knew and help was already on the way.

Unlike the Wilsons, however, Johnston made

the decision not to evacuate. This, she said, despite a warning from someone (likely Custer County Search and Rescue) she should leave.

Johnston, who for years was both a firefighter and fire dispatcher for the U.S. Forest Service, said she told the person at her door “this is not my first rodeo.”

“I understand what happens when people’s homes burn,” she said. “I’ve been around places where their homes were on fire.”

Johnston said she has spent years making her property, which includes 40 acres of land, firewise. Her property is thinned, she mows around her buildings, and her wood shed is far from her home. She said its imperative people do what they can to assist firefighters should the day come a fire breaks out near their home.

“They are going to be out there and they are going to try to save your house come hell or high water,” she said. “I do not want them to die because I did not do my part. It’s a partnership. I as a landowner need to be aware of what they are doing to put their life on the line and do my part so they can do their part.”

Because of her mitigation practices, Johnston said she was confident in her home, as it is highly defensible, and said she was told so by one personnel on one of the fire engines that was near her home throughout much of the fire.

For the most part the fire stayed on the north side of Hazelrodt Cutoff in the area near her home. In fact, if you look at the map of the fire, Johnston is located in the

small horseshoe-like area that did not burn.

“If I really had thought I was going to burn up I would have left,” she said. “I never felt threatened at all.”

In fact, she said, her biggest issue was not knowing exactly what was going on because of the proximity of her home to the fire. She could see the far end of Custer Mountain and a large glow to her south, but never saw flames save for when she walked to the far end of her pasture.

Kelly Kennedy also had to evacuate Hot Shot Drive off Lower French Creek Road, and was one of many in the area who had some sort of animals to worry about—two horses and a mule.

She wasn’t home when the fires erupted, but her husband had to get out of the area so fast there wasn’t enough time to safely get the animals out. He made the split-second decision to open the gates and set them free in a pasture the fire had not reached. Fire was ripping up their lower pasture from the neighbor’s property below.

The Kennedys went to the Rocket Hotel for the night, and ended up staying with friends.

Firefighters saved their home, and on Saturday after the fire a member of Custer County Search and Rescue saw the Kennedys’ horses and mule wandering down Lower French Creek Road.

They were ushered into land nearby, and eventually the Kennedys were able to retrieve them and put them in a neighbor’s pasture, with none of the animals injured. “They were all fine,” Kelly said.

“Everyone was super helpful, keeping an eye out, giving me tips. It could have gone the other way, but I’m really glad it didn’t.”

After they evacuated the Wilsons were the first people to arrive at the temporary shelter at the Custer Armory. They were eventually able to get a room at the Rocket Motel, where they stayed Thursday afternoon through Monday. The first night’s stay was paid for through the Custer Ministerial Alliance.

The Wilsons did sign up for the rapid tag program and were able to get back to their house under escort and get some items for their stay at the hotel. While they were away, a neighbor across the road on Zebroski Lane was keeping them abreast of what was happening, including sending pictures. The neighbor, unfortunately, had to tell them their garage had burned.

He sent pictures, and the Wilsons could see their house was fine but the garage was gone.

“The firefighters (had to make) a decision—sacrifice the garage and save the house, or save the garage, sacrifice the house. Obviously, they chose the house,” Tom said. “I don’t have enough words in my vocabulary to tell them how much we appreciated that. It was straight forward decision-making on their part. As my wife said about all that stuff in our garage—there is more at the store.”

Among the items in the garage was Tom’s car, a 2017 Kia with only 54,000 miles on it, a riding lawn mower, and a freezer full of

bison meat.

Unfortunately, there were some other items that are not replaceable, including old photographs, old camera gear and an antique 16mm movie projector that was his father’s.

“I can’t turn back the clock to that time and buy it again,” he said. Much of what was lost was insured, and Tom has begun the process of working with the insurance company. He had nothing but praise for firefighters, as well as the way the community responded with restaurants offering free meals, hotels offering free rooms, etc., and the outpouring of support for firefighters.

“They exceeded our expectations on every level,” he said. “The community is made up of so many people who care.”

Johnston also heaped praise on firefighters and the response in general, saying her only issue was the way information as disseminated. Johnston is “not a Facebook person,” and said once the power went out she had no way to access the internet, anyway.

“My suggestion was when you put out notice to evacuate, put out a phone number for information,” she said. As for the Wilsons, Tom said the risk of fire is something that is part and parcel of living in the forest. He said he and his wife accept that, will rebuild their garage as best they can and “live out the rest of our life at Deer Meadow Road.”

He did offer one qualifier on rebuilding the garage. “I think we are going to build a metal one,” he said.



## Lake Norden FD called to large field fire near Lake Poinsett

At approximately 1:22 p.m. on Saturday, April 18, a 911 caller reported a large fire in a field was spreading quickly toward the southeast near Lake Poinsett. The Lake Norden Fire Department and the Hamlin County Sheriff’s Office responded to the scene. Upon arrival, first responders observed the fire spreading rapidly from northwest to westerly winds and threatening a couple of homes in the area. Additional assistance was requested from the Estelline Fire Department. Firefighters and a deputy from the Hamlin County Sheriff’s Office conducted checks of nearby residences to ensure evacuation if necessary. Fortunately, no occupants were home at the time. Crews established a defensive line along Northwest Lake Drive to prevent the fire from crossing the roadway and impacting structures. The fire continued to advance but was ultimately stopped at the lake’s northern edge, preventing further spread. Crews battled the blaze for approximately two hours before bringing it completely under control. The cause of the fire has been determined to be a tractor baler. Several hale bales, wildland grasses, and a tractor were reported damaged. Luckily, no injuries or damage to any structure were reported in the fire. The Lake Norden Ambulance was on scene as a precaution and support for fire crews.

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## Pennington County wildland fire

On March 27, the New Underwood Volunteer Fire Department responded to a report of a wildland fire in the 22000 block of Sharpe Rd, Unincorporated Pennington County. Upon arrival firefighters observed a wind driven fire burning in cured vegetation under critical fire weather conditions and immediately struck a 2nd alarm. The fire threatened infrastructure and caused damage to ranching assets. Firefighters contained the fire to approximately 43 acres. No injuries to firefighters, civilians, livestock or domestic animals were reported. Responding agencies included Pennington County 911, New Underwood Volunteer Fire Department, Folsom Volunteer Fire Department, Rapid Valley Volunteer Fire Department, Box Elder Volunteer Fire Department, Wall Volunteer Fire Department, Wasta Volunteer Fire Department, Ellsworth Airforce Base Fire Department, local ranchers and neighbors. Photos courtesy of the New Underwood Volunteer Fire Department.



## Ribbon cutting

Governor Larry Rhoden helped cut the ribbon on two major new investments in South Dakota Wildland Fire. These investments in new, better facilities in Hot Springs and Rapid City display major support for firefighters and fire safety. "Our firefighters play a key role in keeping our state strong, safe, and free. They deserve proper equipment and facilities, so they are prepared for the dangers they face every day," said Governor Larry Rhoden. "These new facilities will provide the support our firefighters need to do their jobs well and keep South Dakotans safe." This past session, Governor Rhoden also signed six actions directly supporting firefighters:

- **SB 68** provides \$2.65 million for costs of suppression of wildfires impacting the state;
  - **SB 136** provides \$5 million for grants for personal protective equipment (PPE) for volunteer firefighters;
  - **HB 1001** improves controlled burning to lower fuel loads;
  - **HB 1002** increases the meal cost allowance for Wildland Firefighters;
  - **HB 1326** appropriates \$160,000 for an East River Fire Management Office; and
  - **HB 1326** appropriates \$435,000 in general funds for South Dakota Wildland Fire Operations.
- Governor Rhoden cut the ribbon with a Pulaski.

## Rapid Valley structure fire

On March 22, the Rapid Valley Volunteer Fire Department responded to a reported structure fire in the 2,000 block of May Ct., Rapid Valley, unincorporated, Pennington County. First arriving firefighters found fire and smoke condition, in the interior of a two-story residential structure. Firefighters successfully contained the fire to the structure of origin protecting adjacent structures, infra-structure 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, Rapid Valley Volunteer Fire Department, Box Elder Volunteer Fire Department, North Haines Volunteer Fire Department, Black Hawk Volunteer Fire Department, Rapid City Fire Department & Ambulance Service, Ellsworth Airforce Base Fire Department, Pennington County Sheriff's Office, Black Hills Electrical Cooperative, Montana Dakota Utilities and the American Red Cross Serving Central and Western South Dakota. Photo courtesy of the Rapid Valley Volunteer Fire Department.



# Emergency services urge extreme caution, preparedness this fire season

By C.J. KEENE

It's shaping up to be a long fire season in the Black Hills. With that in mind, public safety says residents need to be on their toes and smart about fire risk.

Imagine a tornado heading in the direction of a nearby small town. It unexpectedly changed course, and the sirens haven't been deployed for this storm yet. If you don't act, people are going to get hurt. What do you do?

For Adam Davis, the deputy director of Pennington County Emergency Management, you have been ready for this, anytime, anywhere.

"I've been conditioned to it," Davis said. "We've been trained for it. When people seek out public safety careers, usually it's a way of life. I've spent a lot of time responding to, in different formats, emergencies and disaster situations. You just get more used to it over time. It's absolutely hard, but we learn individual tools, how we respond, how we react to situations."

With a challenging fire season in the cards for 2026 and two significant fires already in the books in the Black Hills this March, Davis

said residents need to be up to date on communications with their emergency management system.

"If we can't reach you, we can't warn you," Davis said.

The good news is, for even the most remote corners of the state there is no excuse not to have contact with local emergency services. Davis said it goes far beyond cell phone messages.

"You can subscribe for messages, and you can get it to call your landline," Davis said. "You can ask it to send you emails, if you still have a pager, you can have it send you a page. You can even program it to have it send you a fax potentially."

All these services come into sharper relief when considering the "go now" evacuation order that hit the Rockerville area during the short, but intense, Coyote Flats Fire.

It's one of the reasons Jason Mitzel with the Pennington County Sheriff's Office said the department is not playing games with fire this year.

"With the fire danger this year, it's going to be crazy," Mitzel said. "We're taking a zero-tolerance approach to this. Unauthorized fires, fires without burn permits,

campfires that are unauthorized, reckless behavior with any kind of fire activity, that's where we get involved."

For Brian Povandra, division chief of fire operations with the RCFD, it's going to be all hands on deck this summer for the largest municipal firefighting force in the region.

"This is much earlier than our normal fire season," Povandra said. "So, it's a change and we want to get this information out."

Povandra said the west is looking at over a year of short moisture, be it snowpack in the mountains or spring rain showers.

"I'd hope that it's a nice gentle rain over quite a few days and not just a huge downpour of rain, but it's going to take some moisture in the area," Povandra said. "We're slated to get some over the next week, but that's just a small amount we need to make up what we're missing from the snowpack over the last year, and even before then."

What's more, March is supposed to be one of the rainiest months of the year in the Black Hills.

"There's always been different times throughout the year when we've had extreme fire behavior, we've had some in December," Povandra said. "This, being March right now, and having the big fires that we've had and seeing the fire behavior and activity we're currently experiencing — it's setting up to be a bad year for wildland fires."

That means, especially for those living in dense forested areas or on a prairie, being ready today. Go bags and plans with the 'eight P's' are the standard — People, pets, personal computers, prescriptions, papers, photos, phones, and priceless items.

It also means making sure your house isn't a magnet for fires. Gail Schmidt is the chief of the Rockerville Volunteer Fire Department. "Keep your lawns mowed, and mowed low," Schmidt said. "Get up on your homes and clear out

those eaves. My own personal home, we're surrounded by pine trees. Those pine needles get in the eaves and all it takes is one ember, and that house can start on fire. It doesn't take flame to that structure, just one ember can start a fire."

While Schmidt said she knows its hard, evacuation orders need to be respected.

"It is so hard to be out here, trying to hold fire on Neck Yoke Road, and having multiple vehicles flying through here, trying to see what's going on, trying to come in and get to their houses. It's a safety issue," Schmidt said. "There was a lot of smoke, we couldn't see each other, let alone other people flying through the area. We can't fight the fire if somebody runs into the truck and takes the truck out."

There were reports of people breaking evacuation orders and creating close calls with both personnel and equipment while driving in a closed area during the Coyote Flats Fire this month.



## Tea Volunteer Fire Department extrication training

Tea Volunteer Fire Department had extrication training for members who are in the certified firefighting class on Saturday morning, March 21.



## Pierre VFD extrication training

Members of the Pierre Volunteer Fire Department are shown working on extrication techniques. New members working on basics and senior members working advanced extrication. Thanks to Ace Steel & Recycling for allowing us to train at their facility. From the Pierre Fire Department Facebook page.



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## Northeast District Fire School

Northeast District Fire School 2026 is a wrap! What an awesome day for training. We at the Redfield Fire Department cannot express how grateful we are for everyone coming together to make this possible. Nearly 80 students gained valuable knowledge. The weather was typical SD weather, but the students didn't care and kept pushing to learn. Classes for the day on March 28 included NERIS Reporting, TIMS, Water Supply Tactics, Grain Entrapment, Aerial Operations, Large Scale Emergencies and Building Construction. So many Thank Yous are needed. If we forgot you, we are sorry. Thank you to the Instructors, the Fire Marshals office, the NE District board, Agtegra, Leo's Good Food, Girls Softball team, Heartland State Bank, Chrystals, City of Redfield, Redfield Street Department, SD Highway Patrol, local fire departments and most of all we cannot thank the students who drove from many miles and multiple states to come to our event. We hope you enjoyed our station and we hope we were good hosts. Speaking of that, we must have been good enough, as we were voted to host the 2030 NE District school again! And of course, it wouldn't be a day of training without an actual fire call going off in the middle of our afternoon classes. The Redfield Rural Fire Department responded to a field fire and returned just as classes were finishing up for the afternoon. If you have any pictures you'd like to post, please comment them below. We love seeing it from other people's perspective. Thank you again to everyone who attended and we hope to see you at next year's NE District School! From the Redfield Fire Department Facebook page.



## Oglala Sioux Tribe investigating fatal house fire in Pine Ridge's Old Crazy Horse community

The Oglala Sioux Tribe Department of Public Safety is investigating a fatal structure fire in the Old Crazy Horse housing community in Pine Ridge.

Emergency crews from multiple agencies responded to the scene, working to contain the fire, evacuate nearby homes and secure the area. One person was found dead inside the residence.

The cause of the fire remains under investigation. Federal and local authorities are processing the scene, and officials are asking the public to avoid the area.

(KOTA-TV ABC 7 Rapid City, SD, April 9, 2026)

# South Dakota Wildland Fire enters 2026 season with support from new facilities

*This article is sponsored by Lloyd Construction.*

When wildfires spark in western South Dakota, South Dakota Wildland Fire is equipped to respond.

The division manages, prevents and suppresses wildfires on state and private lands, primarily in the Black Hills. Crews are trained in everything from specialized suppression to managing aviation resources, conducting hazardous fuel reduction and facilitating inter-agency cooperation.

While primarily responsible for the Black Hills Forest Fire Protection District, the Wildland Fire division also supports local fire departments and coordinates with federal and tribal agencies across the state.

In Rapid City and Hot Springs, South Dakota Wildland Fire was approved for new maintenance shops by the state Legislature in 2023. Lloyd Construction submitted the low bid for both projects.

With the budget set by state law, “it was a little challenging, because while we were the low bidder, we still had to work with project architect TSP to help value-engineer the projects in order to meet their budget,” said Donnie Hambek, director of project development for Lloyd Construction.

“We were able to make adjustments that helped bring the price down while still achieving their objective.”

The design, a pole barn-style building, included epoxy flooring and space on an upper level for training rooms.

“The state has been really good to work with, and we’ve really enjoyed working with them,” Hambek said.

The buildings were completed on budget and on time to help support the needs of crews already battling wildfires in the Black Hills this year.

“The completed buildings will be used for their intended purpose for decades to come, furthering the mission of Wildland Fire to protect the Black Hills, their residents and visitors,” State Engineer Stacy Watters said.

“The state has completed dozens of projects with Lloyd Construction, and we look forward to many more in the years to come.”

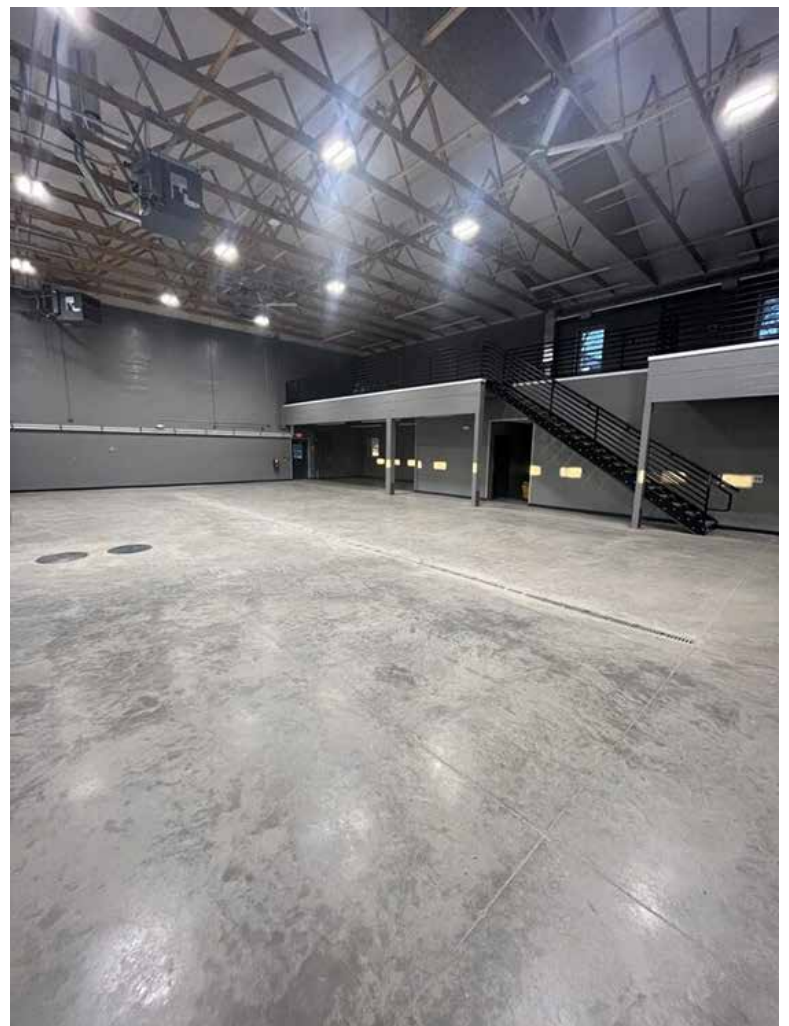
For Lloyd Construction, “our goal is always to diversify,” said Mike Dill, executive vice president of construction. “For a long time, we were looked at as an apartment builder. Then, we got into commercial with a lot of retail projects, then we moved into medical projects, and the intent is to continue to grow our scope of work.”

Successfully bidding on multiple state projects has led to several opportunities, he added.

“The competitive market is very challenging, with a lot of responses, which is good for taxpayers but does make it harder on contrac-

tors,” Dill said. “But in the ones where we are successful, we’re putting our best foot forward.”

“The state has been really good to work with, and we’ve really enjoyed working with them,” Hambek said.





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