Attack Dogs and Safety Fairs

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On May 21st, Clint and I participated in the Estes Park Safety Fair with our supervisor Jeff Singer. The Estes Park Safety Fair is an annual event in which local law enforcement and EMS personnel provide games, prizes and free food in order to educate children on being safe. These folks cover everything from railroad crossings, safe bicycle riding and home fire preparedness. As a wildland firefighting agency Rocky Mountain National Park uses the fair an interactive way to teach the youth what we do as a Fuels / Fire Module.

The three of us brought the fully equipped Type 6 engine and a game for the participants. The goal of this game was to knock over four cut out flames with the water stream from a bladder bag. Once the game drew their attention towards the truck the hand tools, and chainsaws they were excited to learn about fire. We were able to explain why and how we used the tools to build fireline and suppress fires. Parents had the opportunity to ask us about the other projects we did while fires were absent in the park. We use this opportunity to inform the parents about the fuel reduction projects and the hazardous tree removal projects we will be working on this summer.

Local law enforcement agencies such as the Larimer County Sheriff, Fort Collins Police, and Estes Park Police participated in the fair. The highlight for me was the police attack dog exhibition. The Larimer County Sheriff department explained to the audience the importance of K-9 units and the intense training each dog and officer has to go through. (I wondered how much training I will be going through this summer learning to be a wildland firefighter.) The officers had one of their police dogs work a drill. The police dog would take down the perpetrator (an officer in a bite-resistant suit) and then release upon the command of the handler. As the three year old female dog attacked and hung-on to the offender after repeatedly being told to release the dog hung on for the next 8 minutes! The other officers had to yank and pull the young dog free of its target. It was obvious after this first attempt that the dog had more training to go through as it hesitated to release its death grip. However, the message was clear to all spectators, don't mess with law dogs.

There were other great exhibits that put an emphasis on safety. One exhibition, in particular, displayed the hazardous fuel accumulations in and adjacent to Estes Park. This display demonstrated the importance on fuel reduction and creating defensible space around private homes. This caught my attention from the many discussions I have had regarding property owner's responsibilities to reduce the fire risk around their homes. This spotlights a large debate that persists in the forestry department at CSU. Is it the property owner's responsibility to take care of their own area to protect themselves, or is it the

responsibility of the professionals to use taxpayer's money to protect homes located in the wildland-urban interface. In my opinion, professionals should be used on a community size basis. If there is a large community nearby, then I can see the use of federal crews preparing for a catastrophic wildfire. However, every homeowner has a responsibility to federal crews to prepare their home from a wildfire threat.

The other agencies representatives that participated in the safety fair had great exhibits; however, our firefighter game drew the largest crowd, second to the attack dog of course.