



Zion National Park Fire Management



Wildland Fire Meets Structural Fire

In recent years much more attention has been given to the wildland-urban interface, that area where homes and other structures come into contact with wildlands. During a wildland or structural fire, these areas can be potentially dangerous for the homeowner as well as the firefighter due to the surrounding wildland vegetation and lack of defensible space around a structure. Many times the skills of both wildland and structural firefighting crews are called upon to deal with fire in these areas. With this in mind, Zion National Park recently held a joint training session between their structural and wildland firefighting crews to address some of these concerns and to prepare for the possibility of this type of incident in the future.

The two groups started off by discussing their respective roles and how they each look at fire from slightly different perspectives. Next, each group got a tour of the others engines and how they operate. They also discussed and viewed the various tools and equipment that each carry to perform their specific tasks, some of which are unique to their group, while others are common to both. One thing that was stressed by both groups throughout the gathering was that safety was always the top priority.

The training session then moved on to a simulated fire exercise in the wildland-urban interface (a park residential area). The scenario involved a structural fire that had escaped into the wildland (a distinct possibility in many of our NPS housing areas). An Incident Command System was established and individuals or teams given directions as to their role in the incident. The structural crew initially responded with the park's two engines to the involved home. Upon arriving, they realized that the imaginary fire had burned into the surrounding area, and the wildland crews were dispatched. They responded with three fully staffed wildland engines (one on assignment from Grand Teton NP) and numerous other individuals from the wildland crews. Their job was to contain and suppress the portion of the fire that had escaped into the wildland, while the structural crew concentrated on the involved residence. All individuals involved in the exercise were required to wear full personal protective equipment.

Once the fire exercise was declared "out", the two groups gathered for a debriefing and discussed all the aspects of the incident to determine what worked well and things that need improvement. Everyone agreed that the training session was a very useful learning experience. Another training session is planned for the fall of 2002.

The possibility of a wildland-urban interface fire in or near Zion (or many of our other national parks) is very real. They may well involve both structural and wildland firefighting crews. By planning ahead and working together as a team, these two groups can make the job of fighting fire in the wildland-urban interface a more efficient and most importantly safer task.