



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Inmate Hand Crew Valuable Local Resource

Today San Bernardino County Fire Chief Mark Hartwig and Sheriff John McMahon announced yet another partnership between County Fire and the Sheriff's Department – the first County Inmate Hand Crew Program. The 15 member inmate hand crew began their training in May and will be ready to respond by the 1st week of July. The hand crew curriculum consists of 5 weeks of initial training in wildland fire suppression techniques, along with the basic Incident Command System, first-aid, CPR, chainsaw training, small engine and facility repair.

“With the implementation of AB109 (inmate realignment), many inmates are receiving longer sentences and are good candidates for this program.” stated Sheriff John McMahon. “This program teaches the crew member skills that they can use to gain future employment.”

The hand crew's main objective will be response to fire suppression incidents. The hand crew will also respond to other emergency operations such as sand bagging, as well as assist with local fuels reduction programs and chipping operations.

This program couldn't have come at a better time, with San Bernardino County facing an elevated fire season this year. “The groundbreaking pilot program is a valuable local resource readily available in San Bernardino County.” stated Chief Mark Hartwig. “We hope this hand crew is the first of many more to come and plan to continue expansion of the program.”

To be considered for the crew, the inmate must be a low-level offender (no criminal history of violent, sexual or serious violations); must have 15-18 months sentence left to serve; no documented gang affiliation; no prior discipline; and must not be a flight risk. Crew members will not be electronically monitored due to the remote areas they may be working in, as well as the gear the inmate must wear; however inmates will remain under constant supervision.

“Firefighters train extensively and make countless preparations to be ready for a wildfire. Residents need to do the same. Successfully preparing for a wildfire requires residents to take personal responsibility for protecting themselves, their family, and their property.” stated Chief Hartwig. “The Inmate Hand Crew Program is yet another tool in are arsenal of firefighting resources.”

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San Bernardino County Fire and County Sheriff are committed to protecting the communities we serve with safety first. Residents are encouraged to be prepared for a wildland fire and know what to do when asked to evacuate. The READY! SET! GO! Program provides important preparation information. READY! SET! GO! is about helping residents understand how their home's location, surrounding vegetation, construction elements, and other factors place their property and them at risk during a wildfire. More importantly, it teaches them what they can do to reduce that risk – get READY! It also instructs them on the importance of having an evacuation and survival plan – get SET! Finally, it emphasizes the need to GO! and go early, before the fire arrives to ensure the safety of themselves and their family. The goal of this program is to educate and engage residents in reducing the risk in their communities, which will help save lives and property. To learn more, visit http://www.sbcfire.org/fire_prevention_advice.aspx.

Photos of today's event can be found at www.sbcfire.org under latest news.

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