



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Hand Crew Fire Camp Operational

Inmate Hand Crews Valuable Local Resource

On August 20th, the San Bernardino County Fire and Sheriff's Department held an open house of its first Fire Camp. Located at Glen Helen North in Devore, the 8 acre Fire Camp, overseen by a camp superintendent, provides living quarters for full-time firefighter hand crews, houses inmate fire hand crew team members, and provides a centralized location to house firefighting Dozers.

Under the leadership of two full-time firefighter/paramedics, the SBCoFire Hand Crew, dubbed Old Cajon (Crew 40) and Las Flores (Crew 41), currently has 36 members. These Crews provide assistance and support on all incidents within San Bernardino County, including vegetation fires, structure fires, floods, search & rescues, and other all-risk incidents. The program has also secured numerous contracts with San Bernardino County Land Use Services, County Parks and County Public Works for fuel modification projects.

The newly renovated Fire Camp was designed specifically to house up to 96 inmate hand crew members; allowing for a quicker response 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Currently the process to pull the hand crew from the jail facility can take upward to 2 hours. Having the inmate crews at the Camp allows time for additional training.

Currently there are three inmate fire hand crews, for a total of 45 inmate crew members. Each crew has a full-time firefighter/paramedic as a crew foreman, along with a fire suppression aid. A fourth crew is expected to start training in October, with a fifth crew shortly after. These Inmate Fire Hand Crews are the first local hand crews in the state to be managed by a County Sheriff. Some of the inmate crew members have had previous training on State hand crews, bringing with them knowledge and experience in the trade.

The inmate fire crew's main objective is to respond to fire suppression incidents, as well as other types of emergency operations such as sandbagging. The crews also assist with local fuels reduction programs and chipping operations; assisting other county departments in meeting their mission in a cost effective manner. Since inception, the GH1 fire crew has responded to several calls for service. In addition to assisting on wildland fires, the Fire Crew has responded to several urban fires, including a commercial fire at a recycling plant in Fontana where they conducted overhaul and mop up operations, relieving firefighters and medic engines to return back to service. During a previous rain storm GH1 responded to Pinon Hills where a levee had broken, threatening several homes. The Crew quickly went into action filling sandbags and diverting water away from the homes. The Crews are currently involved in multiple service projects including curbside chipping in our mountain communities. Most recently, GH1 and GH2 assisted with clean-up efforts from the recent flooding in Mt. Baldy and Forest Falls.

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County Fire hand crews recently participated in the annual Bautista Drill (an annual drill to certify the type of inmate hand crew under Ca. FIRESCOPE's guidelines). Both inmate crews (GH1 & GH2) far surpassed the minimum qualifications to meet the Type 1 inmate crew standard; certifying County Fire crews to perform direct attack (hotline) and conduct burning operations, among other duties.

Background

In 2013, Fire Chief Mark Hartwig and Sheriff John McMahon announced a partnership between County Fire and the Sheriff's Department – the first County Inmate Hand Crew Program. With the inmate realignment, many of the inmates used on fire crews by the State are now at local jails, placing the responsibility and opportunity to provide fire crew services at a local government level. With fire season being year round and the amount of fuels reduction projects, the need for more fire crews in our County is more prevalent than ever. The program teaches the crew member skills that they can use to gain future employment. Educating offenders while incarcerated is a step closer to reducing recidivism.

The first 15 member Glen Helen inmate hand crew began their training in May 2013 and were ready to respond by July. In March 2014, an additional inmate hand crew, designated Glen Helen 2, completed their training. Glen Helen 3 recently completed their training and plans to further expand the program are underway.

The Inmate Fire Hand Crew Program is yet another tool in our arsenal of firefighting resources. 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, 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 what you can do to reduce that risk – get READY! It also instructs 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. 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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