



City of McKinney Press Release

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Media Contact:

Stacie Durham
McKinney Fire Department
sdurham@mckinneytexas.org
972-547-2893

Anna Clark
City of McKinney
aclark@mckinneytexas.org
972-547-7525

Wildfires a Continued Threat in Texas

McKinney Fire Department Leads North Texas Wildland Firefighter Training Initiative

McKINNEY, TEXAS (Jan. 17, 2012) – Last year was a catastrophic year for wildland fires across the U.S., and especially for Texas. Between Nov. 15, 2010, and Dec. 16, 2011, Texas reported a total of almost 4 million acres burned, with the resulting loss of more than 5,000 structures and nine lives, including six civilians and three firefighters. Projected weather patterns indicate no relief from the wildland fire threat.

Fighting these large, dangerous and rapidly changing fires requires specialized training, equipment, and apparatus. It also drains local and regional resources of manpower, equipment, apparatus and funding. During 2011, firefighters from all 50 states, plus Canada, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands helped Texas fight raging wildfires.

Recognizing the need for rapidly deployable, adequately trained and equipped wildland firefighters, the Texas Forest Service, through the Texas Intrastate Fire Mutual Aid System (TIFMAS), implemented an aggressive plan to develop wildland firefighting experts. The program includes training, qualification and mobilization systems to make statewide use of local resources. Through a competitive process, two McKinney Fire Department officers, Captain Michael Stiltz and Captain Keith Whiteside, were selected to build local capacity to respond to wildland fire incidents by instructing the approved curriculum to firefighters in the North Texas Region.

The highly specialized wildland firefighting training requires classroom activity and intense field training to develop specific skills. These hands-on activities require equipment focused on wildland firefighting often not readily available through local fire departments focused on structural firefighting. As a means of supporting these training efforts, TIFMAS strategically placed three trailers stocked with a cache of wildland firefighting equipment throughout the State of Texas: one in Nacogdoches, one in Austin and one in McKinney. The McKinney trailer serves wildland firefighting instructors and operations in the DFW Metroplex. In addition to training activities, the trailer and its cache of tools and equipment may be used to supplement emergency response to wildland fires.

“The McKinney Fire Department was chosen as the staging and coordination site for this training and equipment because of accessibility, demonstrated support of and commitment to the program, adequate facilities to store the trailer and their outstanding professionalism. The

Texas Forest Service is excited to partner with McKinney and thanks Fire Chief Danny Kistner, City Manager Jason Gray, and members of City Council for their support,” said Steve Pollock, Assistant Chief with the Texas Forest Service.

“McKinney Fire Department is dedicated to keeping our community and the State of Texas safe from wildfire and its devastating effects. Captains Stiltz and Whiteside will be invaluable in preparing North Texas firefighters for the demands of wildland firefighting,” said McKinney Fire Chief Danny Kistner. “The trailer, placed into service on Jan. 5, is an excellent resource for the region. Selection by the Texas Forest Service as the staging location for the specialized equipment reflects their confidence in McKinney Fire Department as a regional leader. This resource greatly enhances our capabilities to respond to wildland fires that impact McKinney and the surrounding area. In addition, we hope to acquire specialized equipment, apparatus, tools and funding through grant opportunities directly related to our participation.”

Many citizens incorrectly view wildland fires as a threat only in rural areas. While McKinney is a suburban community, the unprecedented growth and development occurring in locations that were once rural puts us in the Urban Wildland Interface (UWI) - the area where developments and improvements meet and intermix with wildland fuels. The intermingling of homes and wildland fuels is a volatile mix and under the right conditions can have catastrophic results.

“The good news is that many of the risks associated with living in the UWI can be reduced by taking simple precautions,” said Stacie Durham, Public Information Officer for the McKinney Fire Department. “It is the responsibility of all members of the community to take steps to reduce the risks associated with wildfires.” Suggested UWI fire safety tips include:

- Perform a thorough outdoor fire safety check of your home. Remove debris from all areas around the outside of your home.
- Make your roof fire safe. A roof made of fire-resistant or non-combustible materials can make your home safer. Also, use non-combustible (metal) screening in eave vents and for windows.
- Trim all dead branches from trees in your yard and prune low hanging limbs to prevent fire from climbing to the crowns of the trees.
- Sweep gutters, roofs and eaves regularly, and remove leaves, twigs, and dead branches from around or near chimneys.
- Construct fences, decks or outbuildings connected to the house out of non-combustible materials, and keep them clear of dead leaves, twigs and branches.

The McKinney Fire Department is committed to keeping our community as safe from the devastating results of all manner of fire and injury as possible. For these and other fire and life safety tips and available educational programs, visit www.mckinneyfire.org or call 972-547-2893.

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About McKinney

McKinney, Texas, is unique by nature. As one of the fastest-growing cities in the U.S., McKinney has a current population of more than 133,500. Incorporated in 1848, the city is located 30 miles north of Dallas and is the county seat of Collin County. McKinney offers rolling hills, lush trees, a historic downtown square and unique neighborhoods and developments. The city was ranked as the #5 Best Places to Live by Money Magazine in 2010. Visit the city's website at www.mckinneytexas.org.