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Training and Certification

When the Wildfire Management Branch hires people for its seasonal fire crews, candidates must meet a number of prerequisites.

First, they must be physically fit. Second, they must be motivated. Third, they must have earned one of three WorkSafeBC occupational first aid tickets. There is also a variety of preferred qualifications that will optimize a recruit's chances of being hired.

Once a crew person has been hired, the training and certification process begins in earnest. All crew people must pass a series of fireline courses, including *S-100 Basic Fire Suppression and Safety*. This course provides a great overview of the job and covers weather, fire behavior and firefighting operations. Individuals are steeped in equipment, fireline and vehicle safety procedures.

Recruits also must be proficient using radios in the field, have navigation training and learn wilderness survival skills. Most of the training focuses specifically on firefighting, including: types of fires; burning off and backfiring; fire entrapment avoidance; and the use of heavy equipment in fighting fires. Crews learn how to use a chainsaw safely and receive tree falling training and certification. Some also receive "hover exit" certification (see article below).

The most important aspect of a crew person's job is physical fitness. Anyone hired by the Wildfire Management Branch to work on the fireline must be in good shape and must maintain their fitness throughout the wildfire season. This is so crucial to their work that it becomes an important part of the WMB job culture.

All British Columbia wildland firefighters must pass the WFX-Fit test. This is a standardized national fitness test that involves carrying a medium-sized water pump on your back, and pulling a "charged" hose, as well as carrying a medium pump up and a hose pack over a ramp, – all within a set amount of time and while wearing a weighted belt. The test is extremely challenging.

A number of specialty fireline positions must also be filled during the wildfire season. During a fire event, WMB uses a paramilitary structure called Incident Command Structure (ICS). The four main sections – logistics, plans, finance and operations – are staffed by Wildfire Management Branch employees, people based elsewhere in the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, personnel from other B.C. government ministries and (under certain conditions) people with specialized skills from outside of government.

All of these positions require a combination of training, certification, and experience. For more information about fire crew positions, visit: <http://bcwildfire.ca/Employment/>

Hover Exit

Many fires within the Coastal Fire Centre occur in remote areas with no access (or limited access) by road. The alternative to driving a truck to the fire site is to have crews flown in. There may not be landing areas available in these isolated areas, so some crews are specially trained to exit from a helicopter while it hovers close to the ground.

Crews are trained to safely carry out this procedure while maintaining communication with the rest of their team, both verbally and through the use of hand signals. This procedure is not without risk, since the ground is often not level and mechanical or human error may occur. The hover exit procedure is used only "where no other reasonable option exists."

Initial attack crews in the Coastal Fire centre are certified to do hover exits, as are some unit crew members. Hover exit certification is a high priority, due to the technique's effectiveness as an operational tool.



Excellent People Providing High Performance

One of five strategic goals highlighted in the *Wildfire Management Branch Strategic Plan 2012-2017* is the continued skill development of all staff. Staff training and career planning is at the heart of the branch's success.

By focusing on attracting, recruiting and retaining highly skilled workers, the Wildfire Management Branch (WMB) continues to achieve its objectives and "address current and anticipated workloads." WMB staff are encouraged to hone their skills and establish career development plans, including training and mentorship opportunities.

This approach helps the Wildfire Management Branch identify future training and hiring needs, filling skilled positions and promoting current employees as needed.

Another key component of WMB's workforce planning strategy is to acknowledge the performance and achievements of its employees. Recognizing excellence within an organization creates a work culture where excellence becomes standard. When people take pride in their jobs, the organization retains employees longer and attracts high-quality recruits.

This strategic goal is both relevant and important, since an estimated 30 per cent of all provincial government employees are eligible for retirement within the next five years. Having a plan in place to maintain the high standards of its workforce means that the WMB will continue to "provide for the safety of our workers and the public."

http://BCWildfire.ca / Strategic_Planning

At Coastal

Every year we are asked to predict what the fire season will be like, and every year we say 'we don't know for sure'. It's true! We don't know what the season will be because we can't accurately predict the weather for the next 5-6 months, and a few degrees warmer and a bit of wind can make a huge difference.

In Coastal it is common to have nice weather for a period in May and we've had it this week in spades! What will generally occur next is a period of, for lack of a better term, sloppy weather. This usually occurs in the last half of May and into June -remember June-uary last year. Typically, we get a few nice days followed by some wet cycling through the Spring.

If June, however, turns hot it will extend the drying period of summer, prolonging our fire season. Remember, the longer shrubs and trees dry, the more likely they are to burn when they ignite. So on the Coast, June will be our biggest indicator of a fire season. Having said all that our crews are ready!

Weather

ISSUED: 9:30 PDT Friday May 10 2013

SYNOPSIS: Rain develops over Haida Gwaii late tonight, spreading southward over the Mid Coast and North Island Saturday morning while the southern zones remain dry with increasing cloud suppressing daytime heating and resulting in cooler temperatures than today. Tightening gradients on the surface and aloft result in increasing SW or SE winds on Saturday. Rain spreads southward across the region Saturday night, with spotty precipitation coverage over the typically drier eastern sections of the Island, Pemberton, and Fraser zones. Strong gusty winds are possible during the frontal passage Saturday night.

OUTLOOK: Partly sunny skies may develop in some areas on Sunday while cloud and showers linger over upslope areas within the prevailing strong southwesterly flow. Expect seasonal temperatures (mid teens), cloudy skies, and scattered showers (risk of wet thundershowers) on Monday as an upper trough passes over the region. Moderate and potentially gusty winds will likely be seen both Sunday and Monday. A more stable westerly flow may gain control on Tuesday allowing temperatures to rebound slightly under partly sunny skies. Isolated showers may continue in many areas.

To Date in Coastal	
Fires to Date	
Person Caused	9
Lighting Caused	0
Total Number of Fires	9
Number of Incidents Responded to	23
Fire Danger Rating today	
Current Prohibitions (within WMB jurisdictional area)	
none	