

K9 Friendly Fire Prevention

Bloodhounds Aid in Fire Prevention and Fire Investigations

The Challenge

Over 1,600 wildfires occur in New Jersey each year. Ninety-nine percent of these wildfires are caused by humans, primarily due to arson and children. Historically, the New Jersey Forest Fire Service has conducted hundreds of fire prevention programs at schools each year to raise awareness of wildfire threats and teach children how to prevent wildfires and be fire safe. Additionally, New Jersey Forest Firewardens investigate the origin and cause of hundreds of wildfires each year with many of them being attributed to children and/or arson. Many of these wildfires start in areas adjacent to homes in the wildland-urban interface where they can quickly threaten people's lives and their property.

The Solution

New Jersey Forest Firewardens were aware that wildland fire investigators in Virginia and West Virginia use bloodhounds to track humans who may have been involved in the suspicious ignition of a wildfire. Considering the success these States had in reducing wildfires caused by arson, New Jersey decided to use bloodhounds to promote fire prevention with children and adults and continue using K9s to help investigate wildfires caused by humans.

The result? A highly visible wildfire K9 program named "Tracks." A K9 handler and bloodhound partner are trained to track human scent as well as provide educational programs to children at schools and adults at public events. State Fire Assistance funds provided by the U.S. Forest Service's Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry were used to purchase supplies needed to outfit the K9 unit. The program received an overwhelming amount of interest, in part because of the bloodhound's wrinkled face and floppy ears, as well its amazing sense of smell demonstrated during the educational programs.

Resulting Benefits

Whenever the bloodhounds visit a public event or program, people always stop to see them, which allows

Wildfire prevention and fire investigation initiatives gained a boost by using a scent-tracking bloodhound to increase public awareness.



A New Jersey Forest Firewarden uses a bloodhound to engage the public in a fire prevention message. Photo Credit: New Jersey Forest Fire Service

the Firewarden to deliver a fire prevention message. The focus of the educational programs that involve bloodhound scent dogs can be tailored to various age groups. Younger children enjoy seeing the bloodhounds and learning about their habits and abilities while learning about fire prevention with a light and happy message. Programs for older children utilize the scent-tracking dog to discuss the investigation of the origin and cause of wildfires, while also discussing the effects of playing with matches or intentionally igniting fires. Adult educational programs talk about preventing human-caused fires, both accidental and arson, as well as lead into discussions about Firewise concepts and creating defensible space around homes.

Sharing Success

The K9 Fire Prevention program was created in 2004 and has had many successful fire prevention and law enforcement efforts over the past 8 years. In 2010, the Tracks program delivered over 100 fire prevention programs, aided the investigation of 50 wildfires, and helped in 21 missing person searches. The K9 unit has also served as a deterrent to wildfire ignitions in areas where intentionally ignited wildfires are frequent. This program continues to grow and gain the interest of children and the public, and has significantly aided in the prevention of wildfires across New Jersey.



U.S. Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
Northeastern Area
State and Private Forestry
www.na.fs.fed.us

November 2012

The USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

For more information, contact:

Tony L. Ferguson, Director
11 Campus Blvd., Suite 200
Newtown Square, PA 19073
Phone: 610-557-4103
E-mail: tferguson@fs.fed.us

Billy Terry, Assistant Director
11 Campus Blvd., Suite 200
Newtown Square, PA 19073
Phone: 610-557-4103
E-mail: bterry@fs.fed.us