

## Fire Training – Midwest Style

### The Midwest Wildfire Academy Celebrates Over 10 Years of Success

#### The Challenge

Training wildland firefighters across a multistate region requires a significant amount of cooperation and coordination among partner agencies. From 1995 and 2001, the Big Rivers Forest Fire Management Compact offered one or two regional training programs each year for firefighters in their four-state region that includes Iowa, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri. There are a number of challenges to offering training opportunities to firefighters across a region in an economical, efficient, and effective way—training site coordination, instructor and student availability, and travel and logistical concerns. The lack of a broader regional approach resulted in duplication of training efforts and low attendance in classes.

#### The Solution

In 2001, the Big Rivers Forest Fire Management Compact decided to create a Midwest Wildfire Academy that would be offered in June of every year and provide much-needed training to firefighters across the Big Rivers States as well as surrounding regions using an organized and well-planned approach. The Compact partnered with the University of Missouri Extension's Fire and Rescue Training Institute, which has historically hosted an annual summer fire school in Jefferson City, MO. The Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry unit of the U.S. Forest Service, also a member of the Compact, provided State Fire Assistance grant funding to help the Big Rivers States get the academy operational. The first Midwest Wildfire Academy was held in June 2002 in Jefferson City, MO, in conjunction with the annual Missouri Summer Fire School.

#### Resulting Benefits

During the past 11 years, the Midwest Wildfire Academy has provided over 200 National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) training classes, ranging from basic to advanced level, to more than 3,500 successful students. In 2006 alone, its most successful year to date, the Midwest Wildfire

*The Midwest Wildfire Academy has provided critical training to wildland firefighters over the past decade through interagency coordination and planning.*



*Students participate in a hands-on exercise as part of a portable pump and water use class at the Midwest Wildfire Academy. Photo Credit: Big Rivers Forest Fire Management Compact*

Academy provided 30 training courses to 465 students. All training courses are taught to NWCG standards, and all instructors meet applicable prerequisites as outlined by Wildland Fire Qualification System Guide 310-1.

Students and instructors come from a range of Federal, State, and local agencies not only from the Big Rivers States but from across the Nation. Each Compact State also provides scholarships to help offset student expenditures for their priority trainees to attend required training.

#### Sharing Success

The Midwest Wildfire Academy has been able to meet critical training needs of firefighters from across the Big Rivers Compact as well as provide training to individuals from surrounding regions. Besides offering training, the academy has also brought individuals together through teamwork and camaraderie to build long-lasting professional relationships among students and instructors at the academy over the last 11 years.

There are currently four regional wildland firefighting academies that operate across the region served by the Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry. In addition to the Midwest Wildfire Academy, training is offered by the Mid-Atlantic, New York, and Minnesota Wildfire Academies. These academies coordinate training activities to minimize overlap and duplication of key training courses.



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

November 2012

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#### 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](mailto: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](mailto:bterry@fs.fed.us)