

# Wildland Fire Resources

November 2021

## Pennsylvania wildland firefighters fight blazes throughout the nation

The Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry is tasked with protecting life, property, and natural resources in the Commonwealth from wildfire. Consistent with formal mutual aid agreements with local, state, and federal agencies, the Bureau of Forestry trains and equips wildland firefighters for fire suppression work. When states and agencies need assistance, Pennsylvania wildland crews, engines, and single resources may be called upon, by virtue of these agreements, to assist. Pennsylvania firefighters are trained and qualified under national wildland standards to function either as a member of an organized incident management team or as a member of a wildland crew. Since 1973, over 200 crews have assisted with fire and disaster relief throughout the lower 48 states and Alaska.

Fire crew mobilization is traditionally referred to as a 'Call-Up'. By agreement, crews gather at the mobilization center, located at the Lower Swatara Fire Department in Middletown, PA or another strategic location in the state. Pennsylvania fire crews are formed using a mix of trained state and local volunteer wildland firefighters. Each crew is composed of twenty firefighters under the leadership of a crew boss and three squad bosses.

Firefighters are required to carry their own tent and sleeping bag to fire camp. In order to be assigned to the fire, firefighters must be equipped with flame resistant clothing (such as Nomex®), leather lug-soled boots, hardhat, leather gloves, eye protection and a fire shelter before being allowed to work on the fire-line. These articles are referred to as personal protective equipment (PPE). The Bureau of Forestry ensures that each firefighter has all the necessary PPE prior to deployment.

An engine crew typically has four members, led by an engine boss. Pennsylvania's engines are built to withstand the rigors of suppressing wildfire. Often these tactics involve traversing rough and off-road terrain. Engine operators are trained to understand the abilities and limitations of the equipment and are responsible for ensuring the vehicle and pump are "fire ready" daily. In addition to directly attacking the flaming front of a fire, engines are regularly assigned to the duty of protecting homes and property, laying hose and supplying water to crews, and patrolling during times of critical fire danger to quickly respond to new fires.

Single resources are individuals with additional skills and training to function as part of an incident management team. There are numerous positions integral to wildfire suppression, such as logistical support, building maps, providing information to the public, tracking personnel and costs, and leading groups of crews, engines, and equipment on the fire-line.

Crews remain intact as a working unit throughout the call-up. Crew members live and work together for the duration of their assignment, which typically last 14 days, plus travel. In some cases, a single resource can extend their assignment for another seven days, but in no case will any firefighter be deployed for more than a total of 30 days.

Work on the fire-line is accomplished through all members of the crew functioning as a team, using hand tools for the construction of fire breaks. Fire crews can be tasked with the installation of water lines and sprinkler systems for protection of fire lines and buildings, and improvement of defensible space for homes that are in the path of wildfires.

Families of firefighters are kept informed through agency contacts during the call-up. Individual firefighters' names and their hometowns are withheld for the duration of an assignment, but firefighters are encouraged to tell their stories to local media when they return home.



Visit our website

DCNR maintains a comprehensive website about wildland fire. Visit:

<http://dcnr.pa.gov/Communities/Wildfire>

For local information contact your forest district office. See the forest district directory:

<https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateForests/FindAForest>