

# FREMONT COUNTY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT



The District

May-June 2017

## *District Chief*

Well here we are, preparing for another Spring and upcoming Wildland Fire Season. So instead of the normal get off your butts and be ready message, I am going to do something that I rarely do. I am going to let you into my psyche. Don't get to excited, nothing to personal, just thoughts that I don't share very often.

As most of you know, there are few things that really get me angry. But there are a couple of them that I will let you in on.

Item 1 – Not attending the Wyoming Fallen Firefighter Memorial! Next month on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May there will be a memorial service that we do every year. It is now under the direction of the Wyoming L.A.S.T. team. A team that was organized a few years back under the guidance of two men that I highly respect in the Fire Service. Chief Mark Young (ret) and Chief Randy Vickers (ret) saw a need for the Local Assistance State Team (L.A.S.T.) in the event of a Line of Duty Death in the Wyoming Fire Service. Well their efforts has blossomed into a support team not only for L.O.D.D. deaths in the fire service but support of active and retired firefighters deaths and have even helped with other emergency services funerals. I could go on for quite some time about all that they provide when called to assist, needless to say what two men saw as a need for the fire service in Wyoming has grown into a very large support network for the men and women of emergency services in Wyoming. An organization that I am very proud to be a member of and support.

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**Please attend the  
Wyoming  
Fallen  
Firefighter  
Memorial  
On  
May 13, 2017  
At  
9:00 am  
To Honor  
Speed Hartbank**



2016 Firefighter of the Year Award—Paul Downey!

Photo courtesy of Riverton Ranger

## **In This Issue**

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On May 13<sup>th</sup> we will be honoring the Fallen Firefighters that have passed on in the Line of Duty while serving the people of Wyoming. This year we will be memorializing Deputy Chief Speed Hartbank.

And what will really make me angry is if we (Fremont County Fire Protection District) do not have a very large representation at the memorial. I expect there to be representatives from all of Our Battalions. I expect no less. Most of Us knew and respected Speed, and were touched in one way or another by him. I don't think I need to go on any further.

Item 2 – We don't deal with mental health issues such as PTSD and Depression. Deputy Chief Oakley's article makes a nice segue into my next topic. Mental health. I know, when you hear the words mental health you envision many different things and most of them not good. But the more I play in this arena the more I realize that maybe I am a little more off the deep end than I would like to admit.

When I first started into leadership roles in the fire service the discussion after a "bad incident or scene" was that we needed to watch the guys and make sure that they were OK. We all agreed that we needed to and would "watch them". I don't think that any of us really knew what to watch for. Heck, no one ever talked about mental health, it was crazy. Unfortunately, there are many who still don't understand what all it entails. While everyone now has heard more about PTSD and Depression and understand it has become part of the norm of understanding due to our military, do we really know what we are looking for. Both PTSD and Depression are things that affect firefighters and other emergency service providers all the time. And they need help in dealing with them. While I don't know a lot about it, we now have people who do and we are beginning to rely upon them for more and more help.

While there is probably no way that I will ever be able to erase the images of my first vehicle accident, first fatality accident, or first deceased person from my mind, I know how to deal with it. We need to ensure the vitality of all of our firefighters and see that if they need help, they know where to turn for it. A lot of the problems that we encounter can be taken care of by simply having a good AAR and talking things out. Others need more one on one and possibly professional help. All are available to all of our firefighters.

We need to be looking out for each other. Watch for changes in mood and demeanor. Those who have suddenly become standoffish and less active after an incident. Those who begin to drink more and even become anti-social. If you know someone who has been affected by something and are not willing to talk about it, there is nothing wrong with letting your Battalion Chief or myself know you have a concern about someone. We all need a little help from time to time.

Mental Health issues have become very important to me and I want to ensure that everyone who needs help receives it. I am on a committee on the Missouri Valley Division of the IAFC that is working to address the mental health issues in the fire service and we are trying to address these issues not just locally by nationally.

So if you want to upset me, just say, "They will be alright" or "They just need to deal with it". We all need help from time to time and we all need to accept that.

Perhaps this is a different message than you would have gotten from me in the past, but it has become very important to me. We need to ensure that everyone is doing well and support them if they need additional help. And I am committed to see that they do.

Bonus Item 3 – The thought that I am not available to everyone. My door is always open to any firefighter in the District or County for that matter. While it is appropriate to take care of most things with your Battalion Chief or Assistant, there are times that you need the opportunity to come and talk with me. And for those times I am always available. Even when I am not in the office, my cell phone is usually on and if I don't answer you can leave a message and I will get back to you ASAP. I will always make it a priority to be available to the firefighters of the District and answer any questions that you may have or help you.

Well enough of that. Let's get ready for another fun filled and adventurous summer and remember to "Be Smart" in all that we do. Thanks for all that you do, I appreciate it.

Craig

## ***District Trainer***

Hey folks,

Over the last year these newsletter articles have been very difficult to write. There really hasn't been much to say. Everything seems to be running "status quo" with nothing spectacular to discuss or talk about.

On March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017 around 2030 hours that all changed. Just as I was getting into Lander I heard dispatch advising deputies of a 2 vehicle head-on accident on Hwy 789. Knowing that Lander Rural, Hudson and possibly Lander City would be paged I notified dispatch and headed that way. I was the first emergency responder on scene and like most incidents it was complete chaos. As I did my size up and attempted to relay that information I watched the bystanders do everything they could to try and help. A few citizens were trying to calm and reassure a critically injured victim in one vehicle, while another citizen led me to the other vehicle. He was calm and subdued, as I assessed the damage to the vehicle and confirmed the conditions of the occupants, I never thought twice about the situation. It is part of the job, it is what we do. It wasn't until the scene was crowded with emergency services personnel that the citizen who led me to that vehicle said "there isn't anything I can do for them" as he slowly walked to his vehicle. It was at that moment that I realized he was in a state of psychological shock and that he had probably never seen anything like this before.

As the scene transitioned from an emergency situation to a simple agency assistance call I was able to step back, take a deep breath and observe and evaluate how the firefighters handled themselves during this tragic event. When the scene was emergent they operated smoothly and flawlessly, doing what needed to be done without hesitation. It was only when assisting the Coroner that I saw something that I had never noticed before. Most of the seasoned firefighters, myself included stepped away, forcing the younger, newer members to go hands on and assist. Now, we all realize that death is part of the job and learning to deal with it is essential to our survival and the longevity of our career in the fire service. But why did we just throw these rookies, who much like the citizen mentioned above, probably hasn't seen anything like this before, to the proverbial wolves? Is it a sadistic rite of passage? A way to weed out the weak? Or, is it simply subconscious self-preservation?

The things we do and the stuff that we see will stay with us for the rest of our lives. Being a firefighter is not for the weak, physically or mentally. But even the strongest people sometimes need a little help. Chances are they won't ask for it and more than likely they will initially refuse it, denying that there is something wrong. Firefighters around the world are being diagnosed with PTSD and Depression and the suicide rate in the fire service continues to grow. Probationary member or 20+ year vet doesn't matter, mental health issues are non-discriminate. Take the time and check on each other. The fire service is not and should not be a sink or swim organization. **We must take care of our own.**

Dan

## ***Wildland Safety Officer***

This has been a busy month for safety classes, S-130/190. Chief Oakley and I took the S-390 (Wildland Fire Behavior Calculations) The hardest NWCG class I have ever taken. One of the most interesting, (made my brain hurt). What we learned in the class about fire behavior using weather, fuels and topography and being able to calculate the flame lengths, rate of spread, safety zones, etc. will work to keep our fire fighters as safe as possible in the environment we work in. Everyone should have taken the wildland safety refreshers hope you have yours done, if not get it right away.

Those of you that didn't get to listen to State Trainer Ryan DeFords wildland safety refresher message about MARGIN missed out on a very good presentation. Something new to think about and a different approach to Safety, not only in the wildland environment but in structure fire and everyday life, Thank you Ryan.

Spring is here summer is coming fast, get your pack test done, get your gear checked and ready.

Be Safe out there

Rock



## **Announcements**

### **Cody Fire School**

May 5-7 in Cody

### **Wyoming Fallen Fire Fighter Memorial**

May 13 at WFA

### **Wyoming State Fireman's Association Convention and Drill Team Competition**

June 15-17 in Afton

## **Contact Us**

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The District

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