



International Association of Wildland Fire



Federal Wildland Fire Service Association

Wildfire Groups Concerned about Public Safety and Property Protection in Light of Criminal Charges

HOT SPRINGS, SD, December 28, 2006

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The International Association of Wildland Fire (IAWF), and the Federal Wildland Fire Service Association (FWFSA), believe that the criminal charges for involuntary manslaughter filed by the U.S. Attorney in Spokane, Washington just before Christmas against the Crew Leader who lost four (4) firefighters in July 2001 on a wildfire does not serve the Public's needs for fire protection.

Outgoing IAWF President Dick Mangan of Missoula, Montana and incoming IAWF President Chuck Bushey of Billings, Montana stated their opposition to the criminal charges today. Their concerns were echoed by Casey Judd, Executive Director of FWFSA.

The charges against the Crew Leader, coming more than 5 and one-half years after the fatal fire event, has had a chilling effect on Federal and State wildland firefighters across the U.S., and is also being carefully watched by Australian and European fire personnel. Since the announcement by Assistant U.S. Attorney Thomas Hopkins of his intent to bring the Crew Boss before a Grand Jury, firefighters have been coming forward stating their unwillingness to accept the responsibilities of making the sometimes split-second decisions, only then to find their decisions reviewed with 20-20 hindsight for more than 5 years, resulted in criminal charges.

For the public at large, and for homeowners and others with property in the areas generally described as the wildland-urban interface, this may result in fewer highly qualified firefighters taking leadership roles on fires, and a more conservative and less aggressive approach to suppressing wildfires by those willing to accept leadership positions such as Incident

Commander or Crew Supervisors. The end result could be more acres burned, more homes and other structures destroyed, and greater fire suppression costs to the taxpayers.

Mangan and Bushey of IAWF, with more than 50 years of professional wildland fire experience between them, have both served in wildfire leadership positions across the U.S. Both appreciate the uncertainty of some fire situations, and the decisions that must be made under stressful conditions with lives and property at risk.

IAWF and FWFSAs believe that while holding firefighters and leaders accountable is essential to safe and efficient fire ground operations, the criminalization of firefighters for their decisions is counter-productive, and fails to serve the public's needs for wildland fire protection.

Note: the criminal complaint can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/y9dxcy>

IAWF is an organization founded to promote a better understanding of wildland fire, built on the belief that an understanding of this dynamic natural force is vital for natural resource management, for firefighter safety, and for harmonious interaction between people and their environment. The IAWF Board of Directors includes members from Portugal, Australia, Greece, Canada and the US.

The Federal Wildland Fire Service Association is an employee association formed in 1990 by and for federal wildland firefighters. We are THE political voice for all federal wildland firefighters. Our membership spans the full spectrum of firefighter positions from entry level through management officers. The FWFSAs is dedicated and committed to improving pay, benefits and working conditions for the Nation's federal wildland firefighters as well as providing a forum for our members to become active advocates in the process of increasing awareness and education among those in Washington D.C. who are in a position to effect positive change.