

From the President's Desk

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2005-2006: Looking Back, Looking Ahead

They say that as you get older time seems to move more quickly, and I guess I'm becoming a real believer in that statement as the years go by: it hardly seems possible that we've gone through 2005 and are already into 2006. It seems timely, therefore, to take a look back at those things that happened in the world of wildland fire and the IAWF in 2005, and talk a little about those things coming up in 2006.

2005 started off with serious wildfires in South Australia's Eyre Peninsula that killed 9, injured more than 100, and caused more than AUS\$ 27 million in damages.

Across the rest of the world, wildland firefighter's continued to die in the line of duty at an alarming rate: 11 Spanish firefighters died on a fire East of Madrid, and fires in Portugal killed more than 15 firefighters and civilians in the Coimbra area. IAWF Board member Professor Domingos Xavier Viegas was requested by Spanish authorities to participate in the investigation and review of their 11 fatalities. In France, 2 firefighting airtankers crashed, killing 4 pilots. In the US, firefighters continued to die from heart attacks, burnovers and aircraft crashes. And, as I'm writing this at the end of December, fires are burning in the US states of Oklahoma and Texas that have killed at least 4 citizens and burned dozens of homes and other structures.

2005 also saw a continuation of the inquiries, inquests and lawsuits relating to wildland fires, especially in Australia and the United States: the Coronial Inquiry into the bushfires around Canberra, ACT, Australia are on-going, and

some lawsuits are now being filed against the fire agencies involved; another Coronial Inquiry is underway looking at the Eyre Peninsula bushfires in South Australia discussed above. And in the US, legal actions continue on the 2001 "Thirtymile Fire" that killed 4 firefighters, and the 2003 "Cramer fire" that killed 2 helicopter rappellers.

The wildfire community in the US was heavily impacted by the hurricanes in the southeast (Katrina, Rita and Wilma), sending Incident Management Teams, miscellaneous overhead, and lots of crews to support the recovery efforts. While FEMA and others were pounded in the media and by politicians for "cronyism" and worse, the wildland fire folks were widely praised for their quick and efficient response to these disasters. Fortunately, the typical late fall fire season in Southern California didn't require extensive outside support from the rest of the country, and so didn't conflict with hurricane resource requests.

At IAWF, we underwent some major changes in 2005: our administrative support from the International Association of Fire Chiefs ended, and we contracted with Bill Gabbert to serve as our Executive Director. Bill retired as a Fire Management Officer with the US National Park Service, and works out of Hot Springs, South Dakota. In April, we hosted the 8th Wildland Fire Safety Summit in Missoula, with over 300 folks in attendance. Ted Putnam, retired USFS Equipment Specialist, received our annual Safety Award.

So what's on the horizon for **2006**?

Well, the US wildland fire community is seeing lots of retirements, as key players reach the "magic" age and head out for other pursuits: 3 of the 5 national-level fire directors at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) at Boise, Idaho are retiring, and there are numerous other retirements throughout the State and federal ranks that will be hard to fill in the upcoming fire season.

Australia and New Zealand are already into their summer fire season, and as mentioned above, the southern US is in a drought and fighting fire too. The summer fire season severity in Spain, Portugal, France, Russia, China, Canada, and the US will be dependent on this winter's precipitation, and the long-term drought conditions in some of those areas.

2006 promises to be an exciting and challenging time for the IAWF: we'll be having our 9th Safety Summit in Pasadena, California on April 25-28, 2006 and will also launch a new conference series "Fire Behavior and Fuels" in Portland, Oregon on March 27-30, 2006. Both conferences promise to bring cutting-edge information to the wildland fire communities of the world, and we hope you'll be able to join us for either or both of them.

We're also hosting a "by-invitation-only" 2nd Fire Policy Summit for North American fire leaders in Washington, DC on February 9, 2006 which will address the major issues in wildland fire in the coming years. This is an important part of IAWF's role of fostering communication at all levels of wildland fire to resolve problems and address emerging issues; the Fire Policy Summit is being coordinated by Executive Director Bill Gabbert. If you have issues you'd like addressed, be sure to drop him a note.

We've got several Board members leaving at the end of 2005, and several new members for 2006: Leslie Anderson of the USFS Technology Center and Joe Lowe of South Dakota Wildland fire are both leaving the Board, and are being replaced by long-time IAWF member, former VP and current "Firenet" coordinator Chuck Bushey, and Marc Titus with the State of Washington Department of Natural Resources. Current VP Rick Gale was also re-elected to the Board for a second 3 year term, and I've been asked to pull another tour as your President, which I've agreed to do.

In closing, you can see that the world of wildland fire isn't slowing down, and your IAWF is in fact picking up speed: WE NEED YOUR HELP!! There are numerous opportunities to become more active in YOUR organization, and we'd love your participation. Give Bill Gabbert or I a call or send an Email if you'd like to become more involved!

Have a successful, and most importantly, a SAFE 2006, and we'll look forward to seeing you in Portland and/or Pasadena.

