

FIRESMART – CHAPTER FIVE

# Wildland / Urban Interface Training



**CHAPTER FIVE** *presents a cross-disciplinary training system to develop specialized interface firefighting skills within existing fire organizations. It is based on existing and proposed training courses and simulation exercises for structural and wildland firefighters. Getting the right training is essential for firefighters' safety and their effectiveness in suppressing fire in the interface.*

## INTRODUCTION

Fire in the wildland/urban interface involves both buildings and wildland vegetation. Buildings can be ignited by firebrands or flames from wildfire that starts in the forest, or a fire that starts in a building or back yard can ignite brush or a woodpile and spread to the forest.

Traditionally, firefighters have been trained to deal with either structural or wildland fire, not both. Structural firefighters work in volunteer or full-time fire departments within communities. Wildland firefighters are employed by government ministries or, increasingly, by forest companies or contractors.

There are important differences in the formal training they receive and their understanding of how fire behaves. Usually, neither is trained in the other's fire environment.

It is an important principle of interface fire mit-

igation that firefighters in interface areas get the full range of training they need to respond to fires that involve both buildings and wildland fuels. Partners in Protection is involved in a cooperative effort to promote a certification program of *cross-training* for interface firefighters and supervisors. Cross training allows specialized firefighters from one discipline to acquire basic skills from the other discipline, so they can be effective interface firefighters.

Cross training is not new. Members of urban fire departments, especially if their municipality includes woodlands and forested valleys, often take wildland fire training, or conduct exercises with fire service firefighters. Similarly, fire service personnel are often based in small towns, where they join—and train with—the local volunteer fire department, including taking courses in fighting structural fires.

## THE INTERFACE FIREFIGHTER

### *Training Needs*

Firefighters who are called upon to suppress both structural and wildland fire need basic training in safe structural and wildland fire-suppression tactics, equipment knowledge and requirements. Without this training, firefighters face an increased risk of fire-related injuries and fatalities.

Firefighting organizations in the wildland/urban interface must develop their members' skills at three different levels:

- Basic level training, to address firefighter safety needs and basic firefighting skills.
- Fireline supervisory training, to address safety, strategy, and tactics.
- Advanced training, to address multiple response situations.

### *Cross-training Opportunities*

This chapter uses the training programs already available in Alberta as an example of what can be accomplished by merging existing resources to meet training requirements for the specialized demands of interface firefighting. To learn more about training opportunities in other jurisdictions, check with your local or provincial fire agencies.

Many training facilities and agencies are collaborating to offer a cross-training program for wildland interface firefighting. This joint program offers comprehensive training in both municipal and forest firefighting techniques. It consists of a combination of select courses creating multiple levels of training for the wildland interface firefighter – from basic firefighting practices to senior personnel in command procedures for multi-agency interface response.

## Simulation Exercises

Cross training will not be complete unless all responding agencies have actively participated in a simulation exercise. The simulation must be realistic to ensure that all participants have a clear understanding of the exercise goals and objectives.

One of the main goals of these exercises is for the participants to have the opportunity to put in practice the concept of command and control, to ensure that a safe and efficient strategy and tactics plan will be developed specifically for an interface incident.

By using a carefully designed script, the participants will be briefed on the specific goals and objectives of the exercise. The use of maps, air photos, communication systems, and comprehensive equipment lists will be included in the exercise. The participants will develop and physically implement their plan to respond to the given situation.

During a simulation, the participants should be encouraged to use “what if” speculations, which are bound to generate both positive solutions and mistakes. These must be discussed during the debriefing phase of the exercise. The participants' exploration of different scenarios and the physical delivery of the plan is a critical part of the learning process that will improve their abilities to respond to future incidents.

The interaction between the role players and the participants is an essential part of the exercise; it ensures realism by providing instant feedback and guidance. At the end of the exercise, the role players will take part in the evaluation and debriefing process with all the participants. The evaluation must be done in a positive atmosphere; and, corrective recommendations must be dealt with in a timely and effective manner, to maintain the agencies' preparedness and efficiency to respond to an interface incident.



PHOTO: PARKS CANADA

# CROSS-TRAINING INITIATIVES AVAILABLE IN ALBERTA

## Wildland Interface Firefighter Cross Training Initiative



## Training Sequence for Interface Firefighters

To qualify for any of the levels of interface fire fighter certification, both types of firefighters will take courses drawn from the training opportunities now available in their area that is required by their respective agencies.

### Interface Firefighter – Level I Training Requirements

#### 1. Wildland fire training

##### Equivalent courses:

- Wildland Firefighter Type III
- Wildland Firefighter Type II
- Wildland Firefighter Type I

#### 2. Structural fire training

- Part I Firefighter
- Part II Firefighter
- Part III Firefighter
- Part IV Firefighter

### Interface Task Force Leader – Level II

#### 1. Wildland fire training

- Intermediate Principles of Fire Behavior
- Fire Prevention II (optional)

#### 2. Structural fire training

- Part V Firefighter
- Part VI Firefighter

### Interface Operations Chief

#### 1. Wildland fire training

- Advanced Wildland Fire Behavior
- Wildland Incident Commander  
Level II Fire Management

#### 2. Crew Commander

- Firefighting Strategy and Tactics Command (theory)
- Building Construction

## COURSES FOR INTERFACE FIREFIGHTERS

In addition to the existing training available through institutions like Fire etc. (Emergency Training Centre in Vermilion, Alberta) and the Hinton Training Centre, the following courses have been made to make wildland fire suppression training more accessible to structural firefighters, by developing additional qualified instructors and firefighters.

### Proposal:

#### Train the Trainer Basic Wildland Firefighter (Level I)

The Hinton Training Centre and Fire etc. have developed and are delivering an NFPA certified Train the Trainer course for Basic Wildland Firefighter training.

##### Course Includes:

- A NFPA-certified five-day Train the Trainer training course
- Basic Wildland Firefighter course delivery package

The Hinton Training Centre, Fire etc., and other partners have developed this entry level course for structural firefighters, to convey basic fundamentals of wildland firefighting. This course is also NFPA recognized.

### Proposal:

#### Train the Trainer Fireline Supervisor training (Level II)

Hinton Training Centre and interested partners to develop and deliver a Train the Trainer course for Fireline Supervisor training.

##### Course to include:

- Training
- Course delivery package

### Proposal:

#### Interface Task Force Leader Training

The Hinton Training Centre and Fire etc. are developing an NFPA certified fireline supervisor course (Interface Task Force Leader) targeted for structural firefighter supervisors working in the interface.

## DETAILED COURSE OUTLINES

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Fully detailed course outlines and information about specific training courses are available from:

Hinton Training Centre  
1176 Switzer Drive  
Hinton, AB  
T7V 1V3  
Phone: (780) 865-8200  
Fax: (780) 865-8266

Fire etc. Emergency Training Centre  
5704-47 Avenue  
Vermilion, AB  
T9X 1K4  
Phone: (780) 853-5800  
Fax: (780) 853-3008  
Toll free: 1-888-863-2387

Interactive CD-ROM training systems and references are also available to your organization or fire department to supplement the training delivered to your agency firefighters or to any other interested individuals.

The following CD-ROMs are available from UBC Press, University of British Columbia;

- *Principles of Fire Behavior*  
ISBN 0-7785-0073-X
- *Intermediate Wildland Fire Behavior*  
(U.S. version)  
ISBN 0-7785-0071-3
- *Canadian Forest Fire Behavior Prediction*  
(FBP) System  
ISBN 0-660-17600-9
- *Wildland Fire, Safety on the Fireline*  
ISBN 0-7785-0075-6
- *Canadian Fire Weather Index*  
ISBN 0-7785-0076-4

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