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A scorching lesson

Minot scene of State Fire School

February 26, 2011 - By JAMES C. FALCON, Staff Writer
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As smoke billowed out the door on the upper story of the building, firefighters worked together to fight the fire within. This fire, however, will not be squelched. It will happen again tomorrow.

Residents shouldn't worry, though, as this is just one of the many firefighting exercises that will take place as the North Dakota State Fire School meets this weekend in Minot.

Anything from basic elementary skills to "the most advanced disciplines of fire and rescue operations" will be learned, explained Rob Knuth, state training director for the North Dakota Firefighters Association. The NDFA maintains the school, now in its 57th year.

This is the first year the school is being held in Minot. Knuth noted that a five-year-contract has been signed and the school will be held in Minot every year until 2015.

Basic firefighting skills include climbing a ladder properly, while advanced tactics include search and rescue missions and rapid interventions, Knuth added.

The aforementioned scene took place at the Minot Fire Department Training Tower, located on North Hill. This was one of four classroom settings where the firefighters received education; the other three were the All Seasons Arena at the North Dakota Fairgrounds, the Holiday Inn Riverside and the Grand International.

Fifty-three classes, the majority being hands-on courses, will be taught, Knuth said. Classes began on Thursday, with the National Fire Academy holding classes Thursday and Friday. Hands-on classes happened Friday.

At the training tower, firefighters simulated an actual structure fire at the burn building. Inside, a cow feeder contained straw and pallets that were set alight. While a smoke machine helped to supplement the smoke which poured from the building's orifices, the majority was the result of what Knuth called a Class A fire.

Another alternative used was a Fireblast structural burn simulator, which was brought by the Grand Forks Fire Department. Chad Cutshaw, of the Grand Forks Fire Department, said that the Fireblast and the burn building are similar tools, although different sources are used to create the simulations. With the Fireblast, propane is used to create the fire. Inside the Fireblast, a stove, bed, sofa and cabinet mere representations, made out of metal are set on fire using propane, which can easily be turned off. Meanwhile, in the burn building, the fire burns until it is put out. Knuth noted that the Fireblast simulator is the first test of live fire training, which is a necessary requirement for firefighting certification.

According to Knuth, 903 firefighters pre-registered for the school and 20 more were walk-ins. Including the instructors, the school has over 1,000 participants. The students are from North Dakota, although there are some from Minnesota, Montana and South Dakota as well. The school is the largest single training event in the state, he added.

While the school is not mandatory for firefighters, Knuth explained that the school offers training that, in just 3-1/2 days, a volunteer firefighter would learn over a course of a few years.

Knuth said that there are 360 fire departments and 7,000 registered firefighters in the state. Of the 7,000, 96 percent are volunteer firefighters. Three hundred and forty-five of the fire departments are solely volunteer, while four located in Minot, Grand Forks, Fargo and

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Bismarck are "full career" and 11 are "combinations," which means that the crews are volunteer except for one paid firefighter.

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