

# CAL FIRE training heats up

Written by

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As a blanket of smoke and fire spread over the heads of CAL FIRE's most seasoned firefighters, they had just one choice — fight it.

A state mandate that requires California firefighters to hone their remedial fire skills once a year put a group of firefighters right in the middle of week-long training. Using Visalia's multimillion-dollar Fire Training Center on Wednesday for the first time, firefighters got one step closer to being ready for fire season. The \$6.7 million facility opened in April 2009.

"Fighting fires is so much more than just fires. It's sick and ill people, hazardous material and getting ready for May or June when we get busy," said Don Tashima, CAL FIRE's Tulare unit training officer. "The impetus behind this is getting all of our firefighters on the same page."

The training Wednesday focused on:

- > Fire attack
- > Ladder evolution and rope tying
- > Air-brake safety and adjustment

> Fire shelter deployment

Thanks to a mutual-aid agreement between the Visalia Fire Department and CAL FIRE, more than 60 firefighters will train during the next two weeks. The agreement allows CAL FIRE to cover for city firefighters as well as respond as backup within the city limits. Already this year, CAL FIRE has aided Visalia with flooding and two structure fires.

"We are very fortunate to be able to use this facility," said Larry Pendarvis, a CAL FIRE prevention officer.

CAL FIRE Chief Kirk Swartzlander says the training will be even more important this year, as state budget cuts have caused cutbacks in the department. In 2010, from April through October, CAL FIRE manned its engines with a captain or engineer and three seasonal firefighters. This year, that number has dropped to two firefighters. CAL FIRE will also continue training at Venice Hill, where firefighters get wildland experience.

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Swartzlander says besides training, the cooperative agreement allows city and state governments to work off one another.

"Visalia has a lot of resources. So does CAL FIRE. Sharing resources is the best way the government can do business," he said. "State funding isn't what it once was, and we want our all-risk fire attack engines to be fully prepared."

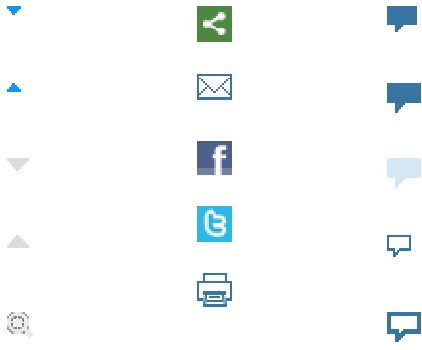


CAL FIRE firefighters train in Visalia Wednesday during a mandated exercise. / Eric Woomer

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