

The Oregon National Guard plans to activate more than 300 Guard members to attend Firefighter II certification training at three sites in Oregon. The weeklong training begins July 27 and provides additional trained resources for the fire season in Oregon.

"We've seen very active fire seasons for our neighbors to the north and south, and we may face a similar situation in Oregon," said Governor Ted Kulongoski. "We have robust resources already in place, but I want to ensure we have the ability to respond with additional support if needed. That's why I've asked the Oregon Department of Forestry and the Oregon Military Department to work together and train our citizen-Soldiers and Airmen."

The week-long training includes two courses teaching wildland fire behavior as well as other entry-level safety and firefighting skills.

After certification, the Guardsmen can be deployed on 48-hour notice to wildfires as members of 20-person firefighting hand crews should the Governor declare a state of emergency. They will be used primarily to strengthen firelines and support agency firefighters.

Other states may also be able to call on them through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact if not needed in Oregon. The EMAC is a formal agreement among the several states and territories to provide mutual support during emergencies.

"Containment levels are increasing in California, and Oregon is having a slower fire season, but the potential for fires is still there," said Kulongoski. "This training is about being fully prepared."

The training cadre includes personnel from the Oregon Department of Forestry, U.S. Forest Service, and Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training. Training will take place at Camp Rilea near Astoria, at the Pendleton Armory in Pendleton, and at Kingsley Field in Klamath Falls.

Oregon recently provided support to California through EMAC by sending crews and a CH-47 Chinook helicopter. The dual-rotor CH-47 is able to precisely drop 2,000 gallons of water from a bucket suspended below the aircraft. The Pacific Northwest Wildfire Coordination Group, an association of federal and state fire agencies in Oregon and Washington, currently has some 70 private contract hand firefighting crews deployed to California.

The U.S. Forest Service and the state of Oregon are funding the training.

The media are welcome to observe field training and certification at each of the three training locations. The field training likely will be either July 31 or Aug. 1, and times will be released in later advisories. Contact the Oregon National Guard to coordinate coverage.

Points of Contact:

Capt. Stephen Bomar
Joint Force Headquarters - Oregon National Guard
Deputy State Public Affairs Officer
Office: 503-584-3885
stephen.s.bomar@mil.state.or.us

Rod Nichols
Oregon Dept. of Forestry
2600 State St.
Salem, Oregon 97301
503-945-7425 office
Rod.L.Nichols@state.or.us

Eriks Gabliks
Deputy Director
Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training
503.378.2332
eriks.gabliks@state.or.us

Tom Knappenberger
US Forest Service
Region 6 Media Liaison
503-808-2241
tknappenberger@fs.fed.us