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## Hand crews bolster ConFire prevention efforts

By Nick Marnell



ConFire adds Crew 12 to its Fire Control Worker program. Photo courtesy ConFire by having the hand crews do the clean-up work."

Anticipating a long, hot fire season, the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District introduced its inaugural Fire Control Worker program, which consists of hand crews that assist in weed abatement operations, fire trail maintenance, and equipment and apparatus restoration at fire scenes. The first hand crew, Crew 12, was deployed on May 20.

Crews consist of temporary, seasonal employees who work 10-hour shifts, Wednesday through Saturday each week, and will remain staffed through late October or until the end of fire season. Crew 12 comprises 12 members, supervised by a dedicated fire captain.

The hand crews are deployed in vans and pickups loaded with weed eaters and power saws, plus whatever else the crews need to clear vegetation and perform other maintenance tasks. A utility vehicle tags along, equipped with thousands of feet of hose which can be loaded onto a fire engine as a replacement during an incident. When called upon, the hand crew can retrieve used hose at the scene, clean the hose and return it back into service.

Battalion Chief Scott Valencia oversees the Fire Control Worker program. "If we can put things in place to slow a fire down, it gives us more time to put the fire out," Valencia said. "Once the fire is out, there is a ton of work to be done. We'll be able to release the fire units earlier

In addition to preemptive abatement activity and support for fire suppression efforts, the hand crews aid in one other key district function: recruitment. "It creates a path for them to become firefighters," said Steve Hill, district public information officer.

A few days after the hand crews were put into service, the area experienced its first major heat wave of the season. "Their efforts had a significant impact in keeping crews available through a series of fires and events that occurred ... where we had incident after incident after incident," Fire Chief Lewis Broschard told his board of directors.

If the district deems the Fire Control Worker program successful, it looks to expand the hand crew operations next year to include response to wildland fires in support of fire suppression efforts.

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