



CAL FIRE Communications Team Holds Conference to Improve Communication Techniques

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Prevention (CAL FIRE) recently held their annual Communications Conference for all CAL FIRE public information officers (PIOs) and Fire Prevention Specialists (FPSs). Also in attendance were information officers from Ventura County Fire, Orange County Fire and communicators from other CAL FIRE programs seeking to increase their capacity for outreach. The conference focused on discussing tips, tricks, and best practices for relaying vital information to California residents, as well as enhancing teamwork and networking between CAL FIRE's communications staff. The event also provided the opportunity for the unit PIOs and FPSs to engage with members who work at CAL FIRE Headquarters and to understand the resources offered by Headquarters and the strategic communication goals from the Executive staff. By understanding these goals, the PIOs and FPSs can better align their efforts with the overall mission of CAL FIRE and ensure that their communication strategies are effective in achieving the agency's objectives.

The Communications Conference was aimed at improving the coordinated communications between the various CAL FIRE units across the state so that California residents can receive critical life-saving information in the event of an emergency, but also in support of the numerous other non-emergency activities the department conducts daily. Coordination on fire season preparations, fire prevention efforts, and other public education efforts are key examples of critical non-emergency subjects the conference addressed. A new topic this year was the collaboration with CAL FIRE Human Resources on outreach concepts for the purpose of recruiting new employees to a career with CAL FIRE.

With a state as large as California, it can be difficult to ensure that every resident has access to the necessary information during an emergency. The CAL FIRE communications team shared their experiences and expertise in the field of public information. They discussed various strategies and methods for relaying information to residents, including the use of social media and media editing platforms. Relaying expedient communication is a crucial part of emergency response because it is essential to deliver vital information to residents to ensure their safety.

The conference also emphasized the importance of teamwork and networking between CAL FIRE's PIOs. Many of these individuals work in different regions of the state and rarely have the opportunity to meet or work with each other. By bringing them together, the conference allowed them to exchange ideas, share experiences, and build relationships. This increased collaboration and coordination between the PIOs is essential to ensure that the communication efforts of CAL FIRE are cohesive and effective.

One of the key moments of the conference was a Tribal panel where guest speakers from various California indigenous groups came and discussed the importance of relationships with their communities, especially when it came to cultural burning and what fire means to them and their

communities through the generations. The conversation was incredibly eye-opening and thought-provoking and gave CAL FIRE personnel a lot of insight in how to move forward in developing good relations with California tribal communities.

The conference closed out with a question-and-answer session with Strategic Communications Advisor Tony Anderson and Deputy Director for Communications, Chief Nick Schuler to address ways forward in developing an overarching communication strategy and a better understanding of their vision for CAL FIRE communication and engagement.

Overall, the CAL FIRE communication conference was a success in increasing the interoperability of strategic communication between the various units and cooperating agencies across the state. The conference not only provided valuable information and networking opportunities for field staff, but also ensured that the residents of California will receive consistent and coordinated information during emergencies and non-emergencies alike. It was a great reminder of the importance of effective communication in emergency response and fire prevention messaging and the need for collaboration and teamwork between agencies and individuals.

