



Uniforms & Patches

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The CAL FIRE uniform has gone through a multitude of changes. In 1905 and until 1927, under the State Board of Forestry, uniforms were not yet adopted; most Rangers wore their everyday work clothing that consisted of jeans and a long sleeve shirt.



1938

In 1927, when the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry was created, a semi military work uniform was adopted. This uniform consisted of the Ranger Star Badge on the front of a long sleeve khaki shirt, brown belt, green britches with brown knee-high lace boots, and the gray or white flat brim ranger hat. This type of hat was very hot, uncomfortable, and difficult to wear, but was considered the proper status for a Ranger. Most Rangers would not give them up because of the respect they commanded. No uniform allowances were given. Employees were required to provide their own uniforms. In 1938 the first shoulder patch was placed on the uniform. The daughter of State Forester Merritt Pratt designed it. The patch was worn on the right shoulder. In 1939 the uniform britches were changed to tan khaki colored pants or jeans, a belt, and boots that were required to be brown in color. In 1949 the addition of a small silver nametag was added to the uniform.



1961

In 1961, the Department of Natural Resources was abolished and the Department of Conservation was created. The "Division of Forestry" shoulder patch was changed to show "Conservation". Still, only one patch was worn on the right shoulder. Added to the shoulder patch was an over the shoulder rocker that identified the ranger unit where the employee was assigned. In 1964 the uniform pants changed to green pants or green Levis. The dress uniform was a wool Eisenhower style coat green in color with Webcord pants. The tie was green in color and the dress nametag was silver. Field nametags were made of green plastic. At this time, all leather was required to be brown in color and shirts were to be long sleeved and khaki.

In 1970 significant changes began to take place in uniforms and badges. The leather requirement was changed from brown to black, and seven titled badges were established and issued to all employees except the firefighter seasonal classification.

In 1976 State Forest Ranger I Herb Nemeyer of the Beaumont District, Riverside County submitted a request to wear a United States 1876 Bennington Flag patch. The 2" x 4" flag patch was approved for one year and was worn over the right shirt pocket.



1976

In 1977 uniform shirts were changed to a flying cross style and Workrite was the approved pant. Another significant change occurred in 1977 when the Division of Forestry separated from the Department of Conservation and became the Department of Forestry(CDF). In late 1977 or early 1978 a new patch was created. The tree design stayed the same, however, the words "Department of Forestry" were spelled out around the tree. A second design arrived about eight months later.



1977

1978

The tree design was improved and the Department name was reduced to "Dept. of Forestry". Also in 1978, the ranger unit name rockers were discontinued on the over the shoulder patches.

Collar brass was issued to all badged employees during this time. This brought the total number of titled badges to 12. The badge did undergo one minor change: the word “Division” was changed to “Department”.

The shield style shoulder patch also arrived around this time, a complete change of the previous round patch. The new patch contained the words “Department of Forestry” over a symbol of both fire and forestry.



1981 1987

In 1981, the words Fire and Forestry were placed over the symbols, and in 1983 a shoulder patch was worn on each shoulder. In 1985 the name tag changed to show the Department seal and the name of the ranger unit where the person was assigned. In 1987 to “Department of Forestry and Fire Protection”.

In 2000, the department made a major change, going from the green and khaki uniform colors to navy blue, a study showed that the material used in the green pants worn by firefighters could contribute to burn injuries. The polyester in the pants could actually melt into skin if exposed to flame. The study recommended a change in pants. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standard for fire fighting pants was 100% cotton. There were no manufacturers making 100% cotton green pants and none interested in making them just for CDF. What was available was navy blue, worn by many fire departments throughout the country. While the safety issue affected only the response uniform pants, the rest of the uniform had to go blue also.

The daily response uniform consists of navy blue pants and a navy blue shirt with a 100% cotton t-shirt underneath. There is also an administrative uniform. It is a semi-formal work/response uniform for attending training classes or public events. Personnel can wear their work pants or purchase optional pants that are not 100% cotton and are a little dressier. These pants are worn with a more professional long-sleeve white shirt and a tie. The dress uniform includes the dress pant, long sleeve shirt, jacket and hat and is for formal occasions such as funerals and ceremonies. One other change occurred recently, the last remnant of the original badge faded into history; the Chief Officer badge transitioned from the traditional star badge to a gold shield badge.

In 2006, Chief Ruben Grijalva unveiled the new California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection moniker, CAL FIRE. The new patch was designed to reflect the evolution and diversity of the department’s mission over time. The emblem retains the traditional shape of a shield, which reminds employees of the duty they have to protect and serve the public. The full California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection name is still displayed to honor the history, culture and traditions, while the new CAL FIRE moniker is boldly displayed. To honor the beginnings, the year the Board of Forestry was established, 1885, is shown on the patch. The golden state was taken from the original Office of the State Fire Marshal emblem. The globe is meant as a reminder of how the department is a worldwide leader. The reason the globe is red is due to the constant battle against wildfires and global warming. The rising sun with the seven points of light reflects CAL FIRE’s coordination and cooperation with local government.



2006

Most excerpts and photos provided by Steve Huntington



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