

CAL FIRE NEWS RELEASE

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection



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CAL FIRE and National Guard Train for Fire Season

Sacramento – As drought conditions continue to have a hold on California, CAL FIRE and the California National Guard are holding their annual fire aviation training. The joint helicopter training is scheduled for several days from April 4-6, 2014 at the CAL FIRE Academy in Ione and Lake Pardee Amador County.

“Fire activity is already well above average this year,” said Chief Ken Pimlott, director of CAL FIRE. “The drought conditions have necessitated staffing up resources much earlier than normal, so trainings like this ensure we are all prepared for what could be an extremely busy fire season.”

"This annual training with CAL FIRE is crucial to our state's preparation for the inevitable wildfires that pose a threat to California residents each year," said Maj. Gen. David S. Baldwin, adjutant general of the California Military Department. "By combining the strength of our two organizations, we produce a multi-faceted, coordinated response that maximizes our potential to protect lives, property and resources."

During the joint helicopter training, rather than dropping water on ridge tops for flat areas, staff have worked closely with the local water district to identify drop areas in ravines and drainages that will allow the water to work its way back into the lake.

The two departments have been working together for over three decades, allowing CAL FIRE to augment its helicopter fleet when California is plagued with dozens of large wildfires during the same time. The annual training is centered on instructing military pilots on how to effectively make water drops on wildfires and how to safely integrate into a wildfire situations. CAL FIRE will be instructing National Guard helicopter pilots and crewmembers in basic incident management and firefighting operations so they can safely assist fire agencies in battling massive wildfires.

CAL FIRE holds similar trainings with the United States Marines and Navy. “By training military pilots to fly fire missions, CAL FIRE ensures that California has every available air resource when major firestorms occur,” said Chief Ken Pimlott.

CAL FIRE has the largest aerial firefighting fleet in the world with over 50 aircraft including 11 UH-1H Super Huey helicopters.

"California is well known for its robust mutual aid system and effective multi-agency responses to wildfires and other disasters in our state. This training is an example of our state's commitment to being there for our residents when a crisis strikes," said Director Mark Ghilarducci, Director of the Governor's Office of Emergency Services.

Visit Drought.CA.Gov for more information on how California is dealing with the drought, and for water conservation ideas visit SaveOurH2O.org.

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Photos available: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/calfire/sets/72157629797798929/>

Video available: <http://youtu.be/aEpwD9sgXKM>

Media Availability

Who: CAL FIRE Director Ken Pimlott, CalOES Director Mark Ghilarducci and California National Guard leadership.

What: State emergency management leadership will visit the annual military helicopter training that focuses on wildland firefighting efforts and how to safely integrate military helicopters into fireground operations.

Where: CAL FIRE Academy, 4501 Highway 104, Ione & Lake Pardee

When: Saturday, April 5, 2014, Training will take place from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Media availability for leadership will be from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.