News Release

Date: May 14, 2013
Release: Immediate
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Fire Safety Leadership Award Highlights Research About Toxic Smoke

"Anyone who has been downwind from a campfire can appreciate the agitation of inhaling smoke. Now imagine being exposed to bitter, thick smoke and heat produced from burning furniture and plastics while performing grueling physical tasks. This is the environment firefighters contend with when battling structure fires", states Fire Chief Mike Duyck. "Though safety equipment has evolved considerably since fire departments first organized, we are still learning about hazards faced by firefighters before and after the fire is out."

Firefighters wear breathing apparatus and protective clothing to survive dangerous environments. Past practice was for firefighters to remove their masks and air tanks as soon as they left a burning environment. For firefighters and investigators at Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue, however, the air packs are staying on a lot longer as a result of research conducted in 2010.

Last week in Washington D.C., the Congressional Fire Services Institute (CFSI) and the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation honored Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue, the Office of the Oregon Fire Marshal and the Governor's Fire Service Policy Council as the recipient of the 2013 Senator Paul S. Sarbanes Fire Service Safety Leadership Award for a joint research project titled, "A Study on Chemicals Found in the Overhaul Phase of Structure Fires Using Advanced Portable Air Monitoring Available for Chemical Speciation". Named after retired-Senator Paul S. Sarbanes of Maryland, a strong advocate for firefighters and rescue personnel during his 36-year career in Congress, the award recognizes organizations for their outstanding contributions to firefighter health and safety.

The eight month-long project used advanced portable detection technology to identify and quantify the airborne hazards present after a fire was extinguished. The findings provided new information on previously undocumented toxic chemicals, such as cyanide and benzenes, found during the overhaul phase that can pose serious health risks to firefighters and fire investigators.

The study also provided a wide range of techniques that can be employed by first responders to offset the effects of smoke exposure. These recommended "Best Practices" are being shared amongst Oregon Departments and included in training programs statewide.

CFSI President Bill Jenaway and NFFF Chairman Dennis Compton issued a joint statement recognizing the three Oregon fire safety partners: "This project embraces six of the 16 life safety initiatives developed by the major fire organizations in 2004 and used as the major criteria for this award. We applaud these three organizations for their shared commitment to this project. Research is the cornerstone of progress and through this study, the fire service can achieve greater progress in protecting firefighters against exposure to toxic chemicals that would otherwise threaten their health and safety."

Approximately 2,000 fire and emergency service leaders from departments across the nation attended last week's annual program. In addition to seminars and hearings, attendees met with their members of Congress to discuss important fire and life safety issues.

To see the full report and recommendations, visit:
http://www.tvfr.com/serve/FSPresources.aspx
Please visit the Congressional Fire Services Institute's website www.cfsi.org for additional award information.

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