

## Monthly Message from the Chief

This month's message addresses some of the many things that occurred in May that impact CAL FIRE and how we carry out our mission.

May is always a busy month as we prepare for summer. In addition to all the hiring, training, and increasing fire activity, we also try to fit in as many tasks as possible before our plans, so often, take a back seat to the call of duty. It did not take long for this May to shatter any illusions we had of completing all those tasks. Not only did the Jesusita Fire in Santa Barbara County exhibit behavior rarely seen at that time of year, we already had two incident command teams tasked to assist the Department of Public Health in distributing antiviral medications prescribed to treat and prevent the H1N1 Flu.



We kicked off the Wildfire Awareness Week at our Davis Mobile Equipment Facility on May 5 and, ironically, that same day the Jesusita Fire started. We were very fortunate to have Governor Schwarzenegger participate in the event this year. Once again, he demonstrated his commitment to public safety by signing an Executive Order that allowed us to staff up in response to existing drought conditions and predictions of above-normal fire activity in the majority of the state. He felt the message we were conveying to the public was so important that he asked to join us at a similar event at San Diego Unit Headquarters the following day. We would have conducted another in Riverside the day after that, but rapid expansion of the Jesusita Fire changed the plan. Instead, a press conference was held in Santa Barbara at the Incident Base.

The following link to the text of the Executive Order can be found on the CAL FIRE homepage, as well as the Governor's website:  
<http://www.gov.ca.gov/press-release/12201/>.

I relate this brief travel log to emphasize the cooperative relationship we enjoy with the Governor and those in his office. He places a high priority on emergency preparedness, and often expresses the confidence he has in us to protect the people, property and resources of this state.

A demonstration of cooperation emerged on another front as well. At the request of CDF Firefighters President Bob Wolf, members of my staff and I met with him and union leadership to resolve a number of grievances. Many are scheduled for arbitration, which is a very expensive and time-consuming process. We have met twice and our talks have been open, frank, and professional. We have made progress on many of the issues, yet realize some will likely be settled only in arbitration.

I commend CDF Firefighters for proposing this forum. Endeavors of this nature are extremely valuable in an immediate sense, and build the respect and trust necessary to resolve future employer-employee issues quickly and successfully.

Perhaps the most enjoyable events I have attended since my appointment have been the presentations of Director's Awards. The events were scheduled at the Academy, Red Bluff and Clovis.

Director's Awards had not been presented for several years, so there was a backlog; 240 awards were presented. I was very pleased to see the amount of thoughtful effort put into the nomination process this year. It is an honor to be able to acknowledge the great things our people do that often go unheard and unseen, and even more often seem unappreciated.

The last item I would like to address is that of the budget, a subject that has consumed more of my time in May than any other. The complexity of this year's budget process is unlike anything I have ever experienced in the time I have been a California state employee. We have all felt the impacts of the decisions made that have led to a great deal of uncertainty and concern and; unfortunately, there are no easy answers.

The budget situation is an extremely dynamic process and appears far from over. To date, CAL FIRE has been spared major cuts and we have been able to maintain the level of service necessary to meet our state mission. Hours of effort working with the Governor's Office, Senate, Assembly, Legislative Analyst's Office, Department of Finance and Department of Personnel Administration have been and will be invested to ensure we keep it that way. We also work diligently with the union and our cooperators to work through the impacts the declining economy has on our fire protection contracts.

I pledge to you that the management of your department will do everything in its power to ensure your jobs are protected!

I truly appreciate the adaptability of all CAL FIRE employees. It has long been a hallmark of our success, and will serve us well in the trying times ahead.