



Recipients of the 2020 Wildland Fire Emergency Medical Service (EMS) Awards Announced

NWCG announces the recipients of the 2020 Wildland Fire EMS Awards. The NWCG Emergency Medical Committee (EMC) annually recognizes individuals and groups who have demonstrated outstanding actions or accomplishments that are above and beyond the expectation of one's normal mission or job duties. The 2020 awards honor seven individuals and three crews:

Burns Interagency Fire Zone and Malheur National Forest T2IA Crews

Outstanding Wildfire EMS Crew of the Year

On Aug. 5, 2020, while the 20-member Burns Interagency Fire Zone and Malheur National Forest crews were providing initial response to a fire in the Malheur National Forest in eastern Oregon. A rock rolled downhill and struck their EMT on the head, rendering him unconscious with heavy bleeding. Just days prior, that same EMT had trained the crew on what to do if their EMT were incapacitated. The Burns Interagency Fire Zone crew immediately worked to stabilize the patient with the assistance of the Malheur National Forest crew. They were able to transport the patient to an ambulance within 20 minutes. The crew member had a severe head laceration and a skull fracture that required emergency surgery. According to the neurosurgeon, this type of head injury is typically not survivable. Due to the quick actions of both crews on the scene the EMT was able to get medical attention in time, make a full recovery, and be released to light duty.

A report about the incident was developed to help train other crews on what to do in a similar situation.

Heather Wonenberg

Outstanding Wildland Fire EMS Individual of the Year

As the Assistant Helitak Foreman on Yosemite Helicopter 551 for the National Park Service, Heather Wonenberg provides supervision of the helitak crew, serves as a spotter, and is a park medic. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Wonenberg led required CPR training, ensuring employee safety with small class sizes, and adapting her teaching style to meet the needs of each student. Through her efforts, Wonenberg helped to prepare wildland firefighters for emergency medical situations while implementing pandemic safety measures.

Jayson Coil

Outstanding Wildfire EMS Distinguished Service Award

The COVID-19 pandemic poses unique challenges for the wildland fire management community. As a paramedic with the Sedona Fire Department in Arizona, Jayson Coil disseminated information and helped to inform decisions in the field, not only for his department but for numerous agencies and the Wildland Fire Medical and Public Health Advisory Team. To ensure he could provide accurate, meaningful information, Coil completed 15 courses in epidemiology and public health from the University of Washington and a specialization in Epidemiology in Public Health from Johns Hopkins University. He engaged wildland fire leaders at multiple levels to address challenges with maintaining operations amid the pandemic. Coil's efforts improved safety for wildland firefighters across agencies at a critical time.

Idaho Panhandle National Forest Helitack Crew

(Eric Krohn, Jacob Hacker, Katherine Babcock, Matthew O'Neill, Maruice Theard, Rob Cole, and Randy Gaulrapp)

Excellence in Wildland Fire EMS/Rescue

Three members of the Forest Service Panhandle Helitack Crew were hiking into the Bonehead Fire in Aug. 2020 when the crew's EMT inhaled a foreign object. She soon developed trouble breathing and exhibited signs of shock. She continued to provide guidance to her crew members as they ordered a Life Flight and coordinated with dispatch. The remainder of the crew, from a helicopter, lowered medical equipment the EMT had staged nearby. The crew hiked in to render aid while additional helicopter and engine crews provided contingency planning and communication support.

After an hour, the EMT was hoisted off the fire and taken by Life Flight to a hospital. The crew member made a full recovery and returned to her firefighting duties a few days later. The employees who stepped up across multiple divisions and operated outside their normal roles to support the emergency medical response made this rescue operation successful.

John Dentinger, Nathan Navarro, Riley Currey, and Austin Lattin

Award of Excellence in Wildfire EMS/Rescue

In Sept. 2020, a firefighter at the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Vale District Office collapsed from a heart attack. Nearby BLM staff acted promptly to summon help and provide life-saving measures. The employee was rushed to the local hospital and then flown to a cardiac hospital. His doctors informed him that he would have experienced permanent damage or death had CPR started just one minute later. The crew was nominated by the survivor, who said, "Without these guys and their quick response, I would have died."

MaryJo Lommen

The Jannette Peterson Lifetime Achievement in Wildland Fire EMS Award

MaryJo Lommen has served in the Forest Service's Region One medical programs for about 40 years. She started as an attendant in a field first aid station. She eventually became the Program Manager responsible for maintaining the region's medical programs. Even after her retirement in 2016, she continues to assist the current Program Manager with annual training and records maintenance. Her unbridled passion and dedication have been a catalyst for a higher standard of care to employees as they work in the field and respond to wildfires.

Congratulations to all the awardees. Through leadership and initiative, they made significant contributions to the safety of the wildland fire community. These awards are well deserved.

More information about the awards program and a link to the nomination form can be found on the NWCG EMC webpage, <https://www.nwcg.gov/committees/emergency-medical-committee>.