

NEWS RELEASE



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Wildland Firefighters Win One Battle, But Are Still Losing the War on “Equal Pay for Equal Work”

BOISE, IDAHO---April 19, 2005 – Last November, Federal fire agencies proposed to cut some wildland firefighter pay as much as 30%. These emergency firefighters, known as ADs, are hired under the Administratively Determined Pay Authority, an archaic law enacted in 1951 that authorizes the agencies to pay AD (“casual”) employees an agency-determined hourly rate without overtime hours or other benefits. Wildland firefighters typically work close to 100 hours per week.

However, in response to widespread letters of protest coupled with internal support from operational personnel within the fire community, the agencies rescinded the pay cut in March, 2005 and elected to go with the 2004 rates. However the battle continues, since these AD pay rates equal \$1500-\$4500 less per 2-week pay period than a regular government employee’s check.

“This situation is going to have a highly negative effect on those who have historically participated in wildfire and other emergency assignments under this pay system,” says Dick Grace, AD Firefighter Association (ADFA) Vice-Chair and a retired Forest Service Deputy Director in the Pacific Northwest Regional Office.

AD rates are utilized by most state Departments of Forestry, as well as the payment method for state National Guard and Volunteer Fire Department personnel when they are called to wildland fire incidents.

Carl Pence, a retired Forest Supervisor and ADFA Legislative Chair, says, “The AD Pay Authority is an outmoded hiring method that was never meant to hire supplemental firefighters. It was used to hire firefighters literally “off the street” in the 50’s and 60’s, and has been misused for years by

the agencies, or, in the words of one Forest Service official, as “an easy method to obtain a cheap, quick source of labor. On Monday, April 18, we faxed a letter to all Members of Congress expressing our concerns.”

The AD firefighter community is estimated at 1000-2000 personnel, plus the 100+ 20-person AD Type 2 fire crews. Some ADs are retired county, state, and federal agency personnel, many who possess 30+ years of experience.

Every fire season land management agencies depend on literally thousands of wildfire requests being filled by agency retirees, non-retired professional firefighters, Native American fire crews, and commercial logging industry workers. These AD workers possess critical expertise in every field of wildland fire and non-fire emergency response, and have been critical, indispensable resources in response to the 9-11 tragedies, Shuttle Disaster Recovery, Exotic Newcastle Disease Taskforce, hurricanes and earthquakes, etc.

Some ADFA members state they may be looking for work elsewhere because of the wide disparity in pay and benefits between “regular” governmental employees/crews when compared with ADs with identical qualifications performing identical work.

An example of this disparity is: if you compare an “agency-employed” Type 2 fire fighting crew to an AD-hired Type 2 crew, the 20-person government crew would earn a total of \$70,000 in wages for two weeks of firefighting, compared to a much lower \$47,000 for the AD-hired crews.

To combat discrepancies such as this, ADFA is proposing the following three recommendations:

#1: Rescind the 2005 Pay Rates issued March 24, 2005 and establish fair, realistic rates for the 2005 fire season.

#2: Request an extension of OPM’s Waiver of Dual Compensation Reduction for Rehired Annuitants and establish procedures that are realistic. Any retiree should be able to be hired back without penalty as a Rehired Annuitant during any emergency incident, regardless of fire preparedness levels.

#3: Utilize contractors and/or personal services contracts to access individuals who were part of the AD workforce. ADFA advocates this as the long-term viable solution. It also coincides with the administration’s emphasis on outsourcing and market competition.

“I honestly believe the American people, with their innate sense of fairness and justice, will not be happy with the effects of continued and inappropriate use of the 54-year-old pay authority,” says Hugh Carson, ADFA Chair. “The agencies know they cannot staff their Incident Management Teams without AD firefighters and crews. Many dispatch centers are flat refusing to sign up ADs, this in the face of another disastrous fire season predicted for many areas of the country. This is unacceptable. For two years we have attempted to work with the agencies to achieve ‘equal pay for equal work.’ ADFA remains willing to work with the agencies to achieve solutions; however we are no longer willing to be left out of the process.”

The AD Firefighter Association (ADFA) was formed in March, 2003 in response to the AD pay rates issued that year by the five federal wildland fire agencies, as well as the non-standard and “discriminatory” treatment experienced by AD firefighters nationwide. ADFA members come from 26 states and represent a significant skill base in the AD and wildfire community as a whole.

For information concerning the ADFA organization, please go to www.adfirefighters.org and to <http://www.eteamsolutions.com/adfa1/legislative.htm> to access in depth information and background materials.

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