Granite Mountain IHC Tragedy General TPS and Information

**What is a Hotshot Crew?**

An Interagency Hotshot Crew (IHC) is a permanent 20-person firefighting crew that is distinct from a regular firefighting hand crew. Unlike most regular crews, Hotshot crews are formed early in the fire season and stick together as a unit throughout the season. They are highly capable firefighters thanks to having more training and experience than regular crews. Hotshots also carry specialized equipment and intra-crew communication capabilities.

Hotshot crews are led and supervised by a superintendent, and assistant superintendent and three to five squad leaders. IHC leaders must possess advanced skills in fireline leadership and wildland fire suppression, based on years of training and experience in fighting forest and rangeland wildfires.

Every member of an IHC is in top physical condition and the crews work out daily during their first few weeks to achieve and maintain excellent physical conditioning. Because of this, Hotshot crews are usually sent into the most rugged areas of a wildfire.

**What are fire shelters and how do they work?**

A fire shelter is a piece of protective gear carried by every wildland firefighter in the United States. A fire shelter comprises two main elements: a tentlike structure made of fiberglass with an aluminum shell bonded to the outer surface of the fiberglass.

Fire shelters are designed to reflect radiant heat from the firefighter who takes cover inside the shelter during a fire entrapment. The fire shelter also helps retain cooler air for the firefighter to breathe during an entrapment.

Fire shelters were developed in the 1960s and became mandatory pieces of safety equipment in the 1970s. The device underwent a major redesign and improvement in the late 1990s. Since their introduction, fire shelters have saved hundreds of lives in wildfire entrapments.

However, fire shelters have limitations. They cannot withstand extreme and prolonged temperatures present in the worst entrapment situations. Under conditions with prolonged exposure to extreme temperatures (approximately 1,200 degrees F), the aluminum shielding on fire shelters will delaminate from the fiberglass structure. Because of this, firefighters are trained to use their shelters as a last resort and in areas with relatively light fuels if at all possible.

**How do thunderstorms affect fire behavior?**

Thunderstorms occurring near wildfires are a safety issue because thunderstorms often trigger strong downdrafts. These sudden and unpredictable winds can create critical and unexpected shifts in the behavior of a wildfire.

Wildland firefighters are trained to base their suppression efforts on the current and expected behavior of the fire. When the fire’s behavior changes suddenly and unexpectedly, that can place firefighters in a critical situation.

Fire suppression always carries risks, and those risks are compounded when dynamic conditions challenge firefighters’ abilities to predict fire behavior.