

2003 Marine Firefighting Symposium Final Report

Respectfully submitted by,
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Event Coordinators

Approved by PWSRCAC Board of Directors
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In January of 2003, the planning for the 2003 Marine Firefighting Symposium began with the program coordination efforts of Capt. Jeff Johnson and Capt. John Taylor. With the dedication of Rhonda Arvidson, and a team of highly trained professionals in the field of marine firefighting, this year's symposium became the most successful, comprehensive and respected training ever provided. This was the third symposium on marine firefighting that the Regional Citizens' Advisory Council (RCAC) has sponsored and can be proud of its relevance to those who attended.

The coordinators of this event were different from previous years and brought a fresh new philosophy with them. This planning team wanted the training to be realistic and relevant to those attending, and not take a "one size fits all" approach. The trainers had participated in some way during the previous symposiums and their evaluation of those seminars helped design this event. It was their vision to provide more than just training to the participants. They encouraged each attendee to take the information back to their departments and educate others. The coordinators were successful in securing training aids that enhanced the program and offered their continued assistance to participants in hopes of providing support that will continue the education over time.

Unfortunately, previous symposiums choose to utilize the National Fire Protection Administration's (NFPA) guideline 1405. At the time, that was the only available training aid to the fire service for shipboard firefighting. Since then, the International Fire Service Training Association (IFSTA) has developed two training manuals on shipboard firefighting. These manuals are more comprehensive and user friendly. They encompass the needed teaching aids and critical information that make for a superior training program. One manual is for mariners and the other for land-based firefighters. Both manuals were available at the symposium to be given out to the appropriate entity. Each fire department that sent someone was given a manual for land-based firefighters and the manual for mariners was given to industry personnel attending. Each of the instructors participated in some way in the development of these manuals, including Jeff Johnson, John Lewis and Ron Raschio, who were members of the IFSTA committee. Their first hand experience with the manual and its ease in use, aided in the success of the program.

Observations

The professionalism and dedication of those attending was very impressive. They were engaged in the training, and participated without hesitation when put into unfamiliar situations.

There was a balanced mix of attendees representing public and private entities. In some cases, the same person was representing both the private entity that pays their wage, as well as the volunteer fire department in which they assist. This balance was evident due to the even distribution of attendees at the breakout sessions on the second day.

Through carefully scheduled events and steadfastly adhering to the schedule we were able to accomplish a great deal of training in a short time. The success is due in part by the attendee's cooperation and understanding as well as some hard work by a few "behind the scenes" people.

The cooperation received by the private sector was outstanding. Petro Star, Polar Tankers, ATC, SWAPA and Alyeska were only a few of the important players during the symposium. Special recognition belongs to the RCAC for sponsoring the event and the Department of Emergency Services for offering financial assistance for those who wanted to attend. In addition, Alaska State Fire Service Training provided two of its members to attend and speak to the group.

It was impressive to see such a strong presence by the USCG. They were there to learn like everyone else, but also offered insight unavailable anywhere else. Their participation lent credibility to the symposium and demonstrated the importance of this topic.

Considerations for Future Symposiums

Some unpredicted challenges presented themselves during the symposium. The date was carefully chosen so that we could get the most participation. This created a problem that had to be managed at the last minute. Due to weather conditions, the Valdez airport was closed a good portion of the time and prevented the arrival of some of the attendee's. As a result, a large group was stranded in Anchorage the day before the symposium. Arrangements had to be made for a chartered bus to pick them up and transport them to Valdez. This created an additional and unplanned financial impact. For future events there needs to be a contingency plan for bad weather that will streamline the process and allow for the financial impact of such a contingency.

Another obstacle that the coordinators encountered had to do with getting a tanker to the container terminal. Even though a contingency plan was in place for the practical exercise portion of the symposium, it would have been beneficial to have the opportunity to run an exercise on a tanker. There were financial and political reasons

preventing us from bringing a vessel to the container terminal. Our contingency plan to provide a walking tour of a tanker at the Alyeska terminal was successful and provided a very good second choice.

A potential problem that was overcome by hard work and cooperation was getting 60 people onto the Alyeska terminal during heightened security levels. It is a testament to the importance of the symposium. Everyone involved agreed that it would be valuable training for the attendees to walk thru a large vessel and were willing to incur additional expense and workload to see that it was a success.

As I mentioned, weather played a role in this event. There were many considerations to be made when deciding to hold the symposium in early October. By waiting until summer was over we could assure greater participation and ability to secure a venue and accommodations that would meet our needs. We did this at a risk of worsening weather. An option for future events would be to hold it in late April or early May. This was not a consideration for this event as we did not start planning until January, 2003 and could not have prepared a successful event within 3 to 4 months. We also didn't want to wait until 2004 to offer the symposium so we decided that early October would be the best time. I believe we were proven right as the attendance was excellent and the weather caused only minor problems.

Recommendations to Participants

Each department was advised to assess their own capabilities with regard to marine response. Once they know where they stand they should seek out partnerships with both private and public entities with similar responsibilities. It is beneficial if these departments assist the United States Coast Guard (USCG) in the development and updating of the marine firefighting portion of the USCG Area Contingency Plan.

Participants were encouraged to seek out additional training opportunities and one resource is the Alaska State Fire Service Training.

Whenever possible attendees should get permission to board a vessel and take a tour.

The instructors of the 2003 Marine Firefighting Symposium will always be available as a resource to answer questions or provide assistance in searching for future education.

Finally, training in the symposium format has provided the attendees an avenue to network with others in the field. This offers an opportunity to learn of training from outside sources and share new ideas. It also offers an opportunity to network locally, regionally and, like in this year's case, nationally.

Evaluation Comments

The following is a sample of the comments received from those who attended.

Evaluations – How often would you like to see the MFS offered?

- Twice a year (8% response)
- Once a year (48% response)
- Every other year (44% response)

Evaluations – Subject matter you would like to see added/expanded?

- Small boat fire fighting operations. Boat to boat ops.
- Small boats and marina fires should be expanded to include operational tactics; what some of us perceive to be the "meat and potatoes" of firefighting
- Small boat harbors are a major part of Alaska. I think more thought and time should be aimed at them. Most of the time vessels over 100ft were the focus.
- Managing small boat fires with limited resources
- More hands on exercises
- More hands-on
- Make the course 4 days long and drill more
- Maybe one more day

Evaluations – comment on the facilities provided:

- Excellent use of all of the facilities available in Valdez
- Civic center great. Petrostar/Emerald Seas – very good and nice of them to allow access. Polar Tankers – again great asset – thanks.
- Outstanding!

Evaluations – How do you think the course could be improved?

- More hands-on
- More input from the Department before the course to look at home ports
- More ship walk-throughs
- A little more study time and hands-on training
- More skills, activities. Use more scenario-based leaning with debriefing at the end
- Need more time
- Longer
- More time; more practicals
- Increase the length of course to cover more material
- You're doing great as it is

Evaluations – Overall Rating of the class:

- The instructor knowledge of the material seems excellent, however I feel we have just begun to scratch the surface on Marine Firefighting and the differences between structural firefighting
- Great class, instructors were very knowledgeable. I got a lot of benefit from it
- Instructors were second to none, truly experts. That level of knowledge and experience can't be substituted.

- The overall expertise of the instructors and attendees was unprecedented. Overall this gathering was very good and extremely worthwhile. Good job!
- Overall outstanding. Dedicated instructors with the experience to back it up
- Put together very well
- Too much class time
- More time could be spent on active learning as opposed to lecture format
- Need more hands on

Evaluations – Additional comments:

- I just want to say thank you to all that was involved in putting on this training. Keep up the great work
- This symposium exceeded my expectations. Given the logistical challenges combined with the expertise of the instructional staff I think this was very well done.
- Holding these events every few years does not enable the participants to develop their skills as much as one would hope for. Basic skills are stressed instead of moving to intermediate level, because of the gap between each training event.
- Thank you to everyone who made this happen!!
- Thanks – great team
- Great class, very educational, instructors know their subjects. Rhonda went above and beyond
- Thank you for this great opportunity

Conclusion

The 2003 Marine Firefighting Symposium has been a tremendous success no matter how you measure it. Whether by attendance, by content, or by the feed back of those attending, the program exceeded expectations.

We listened to those who attended previous symposiums, and this year offered more relevant training. Without taking away from the ship fire training, we were able to offer a more comprehensive class on small boats and marinas. A section was also added on bulk storage facilities. These changes were very well received and appreciated by everyone attending. Only one negative comment has come to light. Due to the program set up on day 2, no one person was able to attend all three-breakout sessions. It is obvious that the choices of breakout sessions hit the mark and were successful.

The USCG had a strong contingent of folks attend, including both the COTP Anchorage and the COTP Valdez. Their presence reinforced the importance of the topic and offered the opportunity for everyone to meet and talk with the folks that they will most likely see if a ship fire occurs in their jurisdiction

It is our hope that the RCAC continues to sponsor an event like this. It would be our pleasure to be involved in future events and continue to build this symposium to new heights. Whether that is the case or not, it is our recommendation that this event be offered every other year. Without a doubt, this symposium has been the most successful to date and has the potential to be the best of its kind in the nation.