

Firefighters travel Outside for fires

by Mike Hinman
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With the fall's first frost and the end of the fire season for Alaska, the main emphasis of the nation's fire fighter efforts concentrates Outside.

A large number of village fire teams and both of Alaska's hot shot teams have been sent Outside to battle wildfires.

"They try to keep (the work days) to 12 hours, but that doesn't always happen, obviously," said Don Barry of the Alaska Interagency Fire Coordination Center at Fort Wainwright.

There are currently 39 wildfires burning in eight Western states with over 321,000 acres scorched.

The majority of the fires are in Oregon, Idaho and northern Nevada.

"It's not getting better, it's getting worse," said Kirk.

The fire hazard increased this year due to an early damp period which resulted in a lot of spring growth. The spring growth of grasses turned brown in the dry conditions of late summer and shriveled into fuel for dry-lightening strikes, according to Kirk.

The crews work in 12-hour shifts,

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pending the action of the fire, for 21 days with a periodic day of paid time off for rest and recreation.

There are 45 crews of 20 people each that have been sent Outside.

"Five more crews are being sent out today and five more tomorrow," said Dave Kirk of the Alaska Fire Service on Aug. 27.

There are 73 seasonal Type 2 crews that hire out of villages statewide. The fire crews are employed by the Alaska Division of Forestry and the Alaska Fire Service, a branch of the Bureau of Land Management.

The Type 2 crews take a three-day class in the spring. They are certified to fight fires after passing a written and physical test, according to Marty Scharf, a dispatcher for the upper-Yukon area for the AIFCC.

Scharf is a dispatcher for the rota-