Winter Fire School 2016
Quality Assurance Report

Introduction and Background

On January 8–9, 2016, the Utah Fire and Rescue Academy (UFRA) conducted its annual Winter Fire School (WFS) in St. George, Utah. WFS continues to evolve in scope and size. It is considered to be one of the largest of its type in the nation. Beginning 16 years ago with just three formal classes and less than 150 students, staff, and instructors combined, WFS has now grown to more than 85 classes and over 1,000 students, instructors, vendors, and support staff combined. The WFS vendor show includes demonstrations with state of the art firefighting, rescue, and emergency medical response equipment. This year the vendor show was rearranged within the Dixie Center Convention Hall to create a more personal, attractive theme. Class break times were staggered to increase foot traffic in the hall and, as a result, vendors, students, and others were able to interact more. The vendor show continues to grow in size and diverse representation from many major fire, rescue, safety, and EMS equipment sales and service companies from around the United States.

Purpose and Goal

The director of UFRA recognizes the value of WFS as a critical mission needed to support the firefighters of Utah. The makeup of students attending WFS this year was 64% volunteer firefighters, 19% career/full-time firefighters, 14% part-time firefighters, and 3% non-affiliated and other personnel. Of special note, this year WFS had students attend from as far away as Alaska, Nevada, Idaho, and Arizona. WFS is designed to reach a diverse audience and has become a staple in providing critical hands-on skills training at the basic, intermediate, and advanced levels of firefighting, incident management, and leadership training. WFS planners are continually challenged to balance the appropriate level of fire and emergency management training by developing objectives and providing the type of classes that meets growing demands. Each year experts from throughout the United States are invited to conduct courses at Winter Fire School to provide Utah
firefighters with the newest techniques, trends, tools, and equipment to increase their overall capabilities. The ancillary benefit of inviting nationally recognized leaders in the fire service has led to new relationships at the professional and personal levels. Of particular interest is the fact that nearly 100% of the out-of-state instructors rate UFRA WFS as one the best training conferences they attend anywhere in the country and internationally. WFS continues to be a proven method of exchanging vital information regarding new trends in fire/rescue safety procedures, proper use of equipment, and “best practice” application of incident management.

UFRA will strive to meet the objectives and growing demands and needs of Utah firefighters by providing the most cost effective and state-of-the-art training available. In an effort to anticipate and meet future demands, UFRA is constantly seeking ways to improve WFS. To accomplish this, UFRA measures the effectiveness of WFS by conducting formal evaluations. A baseline approval scoring threshold has been set at 95% for each course. This scoring threshold was determined by evaluating the overall quality of WFS as documented by students and instructors. Scoring values are used to measure the quality of classes, type of classes offered, and the quality of the instructors. WFS survey forms also include an evaluation of facilities used for training and the overall support provided by UFRA staffing personnel.

The following contains a short list of actionable items that will be used in WFS 2017 planning. (It is important to note that all previous actionable items from previous surveys were applied in WFS 2016, resulting in improved overall approval scores from previous years.)

1) Logistical support

- Moving equipment and props: All props and equipment will be moved into position by mid December 2016.
- Support team numbers were increased for WFS 2016 and will be maintained at this higher level for 2017.
- Storage of WFS items: Dixie Applied Technology Center will be utilized again. This venue was a great success and increases efficiency for most of the hands-on classes.
- Providing meals for off-site instructors will be implemented in 2017. Students will be provided options of ordering meals for off-site classes.

2) Venue location and class size

- Some classes increased in size and all reports indicate that their venue and classroom expectations were met. This higher class size will be maintained for WFS 2017.
- All off-site classes reported that the facilities were excellent, and these will also be kept the same for 2017.
- Keep hands-on classes separated enough to eliminate noise and other disruptions. WFS 2017 will continue to treat this as a priority.

3) Cost of supporting expanded venues and increasing number of students
• This year’s fire school remained within the proposed budget. If we need to increase class sizes in 2017, it is expected that some increase in costs will occur. Students continue to place the highest demand on hands-on training and on the close proximity of venues.

4) Training hours

• Fire school objectives have to be written and match the time allotted; however, should some classes be extended in length?
• Are the four-hour classes matching topic and material? Planners for WFS 2017 will match the training proposal against the curriculum offered and the time needed to deliver such.
• Do some classes need to be lengthened to eight hours? This year, approximately 14.6% or 144 of those surveyed this year indicated that some classes were too short. Supporting comments indicate that those students simply wanted more.
• Should a selection of four-hour classes be limited to lesson plans that can be accomplished completely within four hours?
• Can we increase the number of classes, reduce the standby list, and maintain a 95% success rate with four- or eight-hour blocks of training?
• Several students have asked for more certification courses, if possible, in the two-day window (Ice Rescue, Fire Instructor II, NWCG courses, and two-day ICS 300 course).

Summary

Winter Fire School 2016 proved to be another very successful event. Overall, student numbers continue to increase as well as vendor participation. The number of students that attended this year’s fire school reached 695. We are honored and humbled by the high attendance and recognize the commitment of students, instructors, and exhibitors. We continue to develop new strategies to address the growing number of students while still delivering high-quality training classes, which are heavily geared at “hands-on” training events. Statistical reports are used to assist in the planning of future fire schools. The answers to the questions in the surveys, along with written comments from the students, paint a clear picture of what students expect and would like to see at future fire schools: Students continue to push as many hands-on classes as possible along with advanced training in high-risk, low-frequency incidents. Program managers and other subject matter experts define WFS as the place to get specialized firefighter training that is not easily acquired in remote areas of the state. To continue conducting a high quality Winter Fire School, the Utah Fire and Rescue Academy will apply lessons learned and best practices to all future planning and delivery.
The graph below illustrates the results from Winter Fire School Quality Assurance Reports of 2014, 2015, and 2016. It is based on a total scoring value goal of 100%. The total percentage scores were collected from students, instructors, and vendors, and the options they were given ranged from excellent to poor.