

Fire Technology Programs in the Desert Region

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The fire service in California, particularly in the Desert Region, is experiencing an unprecedented amount of turnover due to attrition and expansion of services. A recent survey commissioned by the Chancellors Office indicates that over 27% of the fire service in the Desert Region will be hired in the next three to five years. Public safety is always of utmost concern to citizens and elected officials. The quality of the new firefighters who enter the workforce and advance through the fire service career ladder will depend upon the quality and quantity of Fire Technology training and education provided by the community colleges. Obviously the need for quality and consistent fire service training and education is critical to this industry.

One would assume that the Fire Technology courses offered throughout the Desert Region, and the state, would be consistent as to course content and hours. While some courses are indeed similar if not the same, a majority of Fire Technology courses vary to some degree from college to college. Although the Chancellors office issued a list of core courses and content that should be included in an AS degree program in a 1986 report, inconsistencies continue to exist among college programs. In addition, each college in the Desert Region has established electives and other training courses on an individual basis. This has led to inconsistency in the courses offered from college to college and in the content and hours among similar courses. The first step to begin moving toward inter-college fire technology course consistency is to establish a matrix outlining what is currently being offered.

The attached matrix shows all the fire technology programs in the Desert Region, including course numbers, names, lecture and lab hours, and prerequisites. The intent is to draw comparisons and inconsistencies among the various courses. This information will assist the region in ensuring that consistent and appropriate instruction is available to existing and pre-service firefighters.

There are seven colleges within the Desert Region that offer fire technology programs. The content of the programs vary from Associate Degree and Certificate tracks to in-service courses meeting state or federal certification standards and local department needs. The colleges within the Desert Region that offer Fire Technology courses include:

- Riverside Community College (RCC)
- College of the Desert (COD)
- Mt. San Jacinto College (MSJC)
- Victor Valley College (VVC)
- Crafton Hills College (CHC)
- Barstow College (BC)
- Palo Verde College (PVC)

For the purposes of this project, the Fire Technology courses have been grouped into ten general clusters:

- **Academic courses.** These courses are generally delivered on a semester format with classes meeting one or twice per week. These courses are required or elective courses in degree or certificate programs.
- **Fire Dispatch courses.** These courses include pre-service training that prepares students for a career in emergency dispatch and in-service training for individuals currently working in fire department dispatch centers.
- **Fire Academy.** These courses include the Basic Fire Academy that is accredited by the California State Fire Marshal and other support courses.
- **California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) certified courses.** These courses are designed to meet the pre-service and in-service training standards for CDF. These courses are certified by a local CDF administrative unit and are presented based on local needs.
- **National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) certified courses.** These courses are designed to meet the in-service training standard set by NWCG, which includes several federal firefighting organizations such as United States Forrest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and National Parks Service.
- **California State Fire Training CFSTES courses.** These courses are certified by California Office of State Fire Training and lead to a position certificate such as Fire Officer, Chief Officer, Prevention Officer, etc. CFSTES certificates are often required by fire departments for advancement.
- **California State Fire Training FSTEP courses.** The California Office of State Fire Training certifies these courses as approved by the State Board of Fire Services. These courses are designed to meet the in-service training and education needs of California fire departments.
- **Hazardous Materials courses.** These courses are certified by the California Specialized Training Institute and meet the mandated hazardous materials training needs of the fire service.
- **Emergency Medical Service (EMS) courses.** These courses meet the emergency medical training needs of the fire service and range from first aid-CPR to full EMT certification.
- **Miscellaneous In-Service courses.** These courses are established and delivered to meet local fire service needs. These courses generally are not certified by a regional or state organization and the content and hours vary widely from college to college.

The following matrix was developed using course information from the latest available catalogs from each college. When clarification was necessary, the colleges' counseling offices and/or fire technology coordinators were contacted. The matrix can be utilized by colleges within the Desert Region to gain an understanding of the breadth of courses being offered in the region, ensure that their existing curriculum is current and consistent with the needs of industry, and assist in the evaluation of Fire Technology courses that students request to transfer from college to college.

The overall intent of this project is to assist colleges with the development of their Fire Technology programs. Because these programs are dynamic, the matrix should be updated on a regular basis to ensure that the information remains relevant. In addition, it is recommended that, in the near future, this project should be expanded to include all Fire Technology programs throughout the State. This would give a variety of end users, including colleges, four-year schools, fire departments, the Office of State Fire Training, and the Chancellor's Office the ability to assess the state-wide fire service training and education delivery mechanism in California.

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