



Recipients of the 2024 Wildland Fire Emergency Medical Service (EMS) Awards Announced

NWCG announces the recipients of the 2024 Wildland Fire EMS Awards. The NWCG Emergency Medical Committee (EMC) annually recognizes individuals and groups who have demonstrated outstanding actions or accomplishments that are above and beyond the expectation of one's normal mission or job duties.

Eric Solomon, BLM California

Outstanding Wildland Fire EMS Individual of the Year

Eric Solomon has worked to build and advance CA-BLM's Operational Medical Support Program (OMSP), working to find POCs on each BLM-CA District to help facilitate trainings and buy medical gear. He has served as BLM-CA main OMSP point of contact to the national office the last couple of years. He has been a huge advocate for the program. In addition to helping build-up the OMSP in California, Eric has been one of the coordinators for fire program in assisting with staffing the Dumont Dune's Off-Highway Vehicle events and has used this opportunity to get other Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) in BLM-CA valuable firsthand EMS experience. Eric's commitment to the CA-OMSP has been huge, and for the most part outside his normal roles and responsibilities in the fire program.

Asheville Interagency Hotshot Crew, National Forests in North Carolina

Outstanding Wildland Fire EMS Crew of the Year

The Asheville Interagency Hotshot Crew (IHC) is unique in the world of IHCs with it being focused on a Leadership Development Program. They bring in 14-16 detailers every season to push them out of their comfort zone and into leadership positions, including in the world of EMS. They actively seek out firefighters with EMT certifications and place a high emphasis on training. In recent years, the hotshots have built a relationship with the National Forests in North Carolina Local Emergency Medical Advisor's (LEMA) Dr.'s Hawkins and Peluso. It has become standard practice to bring the LEMAs to the IHC onboarding medical training and scenario day. The LEMAs provide a high degree of training and an opportunity for the new crewmembers to interact with their medical advisors and have discussions of pertinent issues. Additionally, they have worked with the Forest's EMS Coordinator to host and attend more routine trainings and advocate for expanded scopes.

The 2024 IHC season saw two critical incidents for the crew. One crew member was admitted to the local trauma hospital suffering from severe rhabdomyolysis. The other incident involved a tree strike that also sent the crew member to a hospital. In both incidents, trained and experienced crew EMTs were on scene and provided quality patient care that affected the outcome in a positive direction. The care and compassion shown by the crew takes the Forest Service's motto "Caring for the land and serving people" to another level. Lessons learned from these two incidents have been documented, discussed, and integrated into crew operations, as is their usual standard for all critical incidents. The Asheville IHC exemplify a learning culture that should be modeled by other EMS practitioners.

Austin Blackett, BLM Utah*Outstanding Wildland Fire EMS Distinguished Service*

When OMSP started for BLM Utah, Austin took the lead for the program as a collateral duty. He is heavily invested in maintaining a high standard for OMSP providers. Austin takes the time to ensure providers are fully trained for every situation. He leads a demanding, and realistic, spring training where each provider must lead a simulated medical situation to figure out what is needed and how to properly care for the injured individuals. This stress component helps the providers when they are in a real situation to keep calm and work through the problem. Austin's leadership has been proven over the years with multiple incidents where the BLM Utah OMSP providers have responded independently and managed very stressful situations including multiple vehicle incidents on the freeway, ATV/UTV accidents, assisting with search and rescue, and assisting with care for and evacuating fire fighters from fires. In 2024 his training was critical in saving a life on the Little Twist Fire tree strike incident. The OMSP providers on Bonneville hotshots jumped into action utilizing the training they received and were able to get to the patient quickly and administer care to the injured firefighter, identifying the care and transport needed to get the firefighter off the line and to a higher level of care. Austin is regularly in contact with OMSP providers in the state to do After Action Reviews to ensure the training is adequate or if adjustments to training are needed. He is also responsible for the inventory of all medical gear bags and getting the supplies to OMSP providers when they use medical equipment out of their bags. BLM Utah OMSP is successful because of Austin, and many states are in contact with him to learn about all aspects of his program.

Dr. Randall Bennett, Coronado National Forest and Gila National Forest*Janette Peterson Lifetime Achievement in Wildland Fire EMS*

For almost two decades, Dr. Randall "Randy" Bennett advised prehospital emergency medical care for both the National Park Service and US Forest Service units. "Ranger Randy" worked as a seasonal ranger in King's Canyon National Park, Dr. Bennett provided medical direction to NPS EMS providers for 17 years at 14 NPS units as well as three National Forests in the last six years. He is well known for being able to explain and teach complex medical concepts in understandable ways and give people the confidence to apply them in stressful situations. Dr. Bennett also ensured providers had quality equipment to use the knowledge and skills.

Under the guidance of Dr. Bennett, the Silver City IHC, received regional and national recognition for their readiness and ability to respond to emergency medical incidents in the wildland fire community. Dr. Bennett has also been an active in the NPS and USFS medical advisor community working to improve and standardize these programs at the agency level.

Congratulations to all the awardees and nominees. Through leadership and initiative, they have made significant contributions to the safety of the wildland fire community. These awards are well deserved. More information about the awards program and how to nominate an individual or crew can be found on the NWCG EMC webpage, <https://www.nwcg.gov/committees/emergency-medical-committee>.