

# South Dakota National Guard

## Public Affairs Office

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## South Dakota Wildland Fire Division trains guard Soldiers

RAPID CITY – Soldiers from the South Dakota Army National Guard attended a one-day bulldozer and fire line training put on by the South Dakota State Wildland Fire Division, May 13, at Range Road Armory.

The Soldiers were able to utilize the day to get familiar with the wildland fire crew and their procedures as well as get some much-needed driving time in the bulldozers.

“This training allows us to react to a wildland fire if we are called upon by the state,” said Staff Sgt. Ryan Erhardt, horizontal construction engineer, 842nd Engineer Company. “It also allows our operators to get more driving time on the bulldozers.”

Soldiers spent the morning in the classroom learning about how a wildfire burns, what the firefighters will do on the scene and what is expected of them when they show up.

“The classroom training involved talking through if a wildfire were to occur how does that process go from the fire starting and being noticed to having a bulldozer operator on the line,” said Capt. Shane Skinner, administrative officer for the 109th Engineer Battalion. “They walk the dog on what a bulldozer operator’s expectations are in the field.”

In the afternoon the Soldiers went to West Camp Rapid to operate the bulldozers and learn skills that they may be unfamiliar with.

“The Soldiers will operate two bulldozers in tandem encountering some of the things that they will run into that are unique in wildland fire rescue,” said Skinner. “Generally speaking, during a wildland or forest fire you are dealing with trees, bulldozers move trees out of the way, but it is not something that we typically do as a critical piece of moving dirt. So, they will talk about that skill today.”

The training provided the wildland firefighters, and the guard Soldiers the opportunity to become familiar with each other and how they operate if they were called to help on a fire.

“One of the big things that this training accomplishes is building relationships between the two entities,” said Skinner. “We in the south Dakota National Guard could interact with many state agencies and those relationships are not always clear; who’s in charge, who gets to do what or who’s lane is it to do a task.”

The training was beneficial for the Department of Wildland Fire as well as the Soldiers attending the class.

“This training helps to give us more resources in our back pocket when we need more support for many fires or large fires,” said Brady Rothschadl, South Dakota Wildland Fire Division Mechanic and bulldozer operator. “Now, we have more qualified people to run bulldozers.”

Bulldozer operators are just a part of what the Wildland Fire division is getting from this partnership.

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“The benefit of this training is to have more assets when it does get to the hot and dry season,” said RothSchadl. “Right now, we only have one bulldozer with a second one on the way and I am the only full-time employee as a bulldozer operator. All our other guys are either DOT operators that can work for us on the weekends or we have a couple other guys that are just call when needed. So, this just gives us more personnel and equipment to help.”

The training also helped broaden the thinking and problem-solving ability of the Soldiers.

“I think that sometimes we as engineers especially focused engineers such as a bulldozer operators approach problem with a single idea of how we are going to do it, said Skinner. “Training like this broadens the scope of tools that our soldiers can use or leverage against a problem set.”

This training will be beneficial to Soldiers not only fighting fires but doing their daily jobs as well.

“This could pay dividends to our soldiers down the road when they are asked how we are moving this dirt or what is important when we start cutting into this soil,” said Skinner. It broadens their scope of understanding a problem set and really gives them a set of skills that they can use later.”

Overall, the day was a success. Soldiers and firefighters got to work together to understand each of their roles on a wildfire, the Wildland Fire Division gained some new assets to use if needed and the Soldiers learned valuable skills that they can take to their daily job.

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**220513-Z-BS230-0126:** South Dakota Army National Guard engineers cut in a fire line during training with the South Dakota Department of Wildland Fire at Rapid City, SD., May 13, 2022. Soldiers trained with firefighters to build relationships in the event they are called to a wildfire (U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Staff Sgt. Dustin Jordan)



**220513-Z-BS230-0145:** South Dakota Army National Guard engineers cut in a fire line during training with the South Dakota Department of Wildland Fire at Rapid City, SD., May 13, 2022. Soldiers trained with firefighters to build relationships in the event they are called to a wildfire (U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Staff Sgt. Dustin Jordan)



**220513-Z-BS230-0161:** South Dakota Army National Guard engineers cut in a fire line during training with the South Dakota Department of Wildland Fire at Rapid City, SD., May 13, 2022. Soldiers trained with firefighters to build relationships in the event they are called to a wildfire (U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Staff Sgt. Dustin Jordan)



**220513-Z-BS230-0173:** South Dakota Army National Guard engineers cut in a fire line during training with the South Dakota Department of Wildland Fire at Rapid City, SD., May 13, 2022. Soldiers trained with firefighters to build relationships in the event they are called to a wildfire (U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Staff Sgt. Dustin Jordan)