



## NEWS ADVISORY

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For immediate release

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### **Governor Honors Missoula Fire Department for Helping Hands**

Gov. Steve Bullock has commended the Missoula Fire Department for responding to the state of California's request for help with wildfires in December.

"When California called for assistance, Missoula's firefighters answered that call with bravery and dedication. They represented the best of Montana and gained valuable experience to apply here at home when the time comes," said Governor Bullock. "Thank you to our firefighters for doing extraordinary things that keep Montana the Last Best Place."

The Missoula Fire Department responded to California's call for 50 Engine Strike Teams from Montana and six other western states during the wildfires in the Los Angeles area late last year. An Engine Strike Team consists of five fire engine crews. Two wildland engine crews and a Strike Team Leader from the Missoula Fire Department teamed up with three other engine crews from Big Sky, Columbus and Missoula Rural Fire and responded as a Strike Team to assist with firefighting efforts in the Ventura and Santa Barbara areas. An additional Missoula Fire Department engine crew was sent to the same area approximately one week following the initial Strike Team response. In all, the Missoula Fire Department sent three engines and 12 personnel.

The Missoula Fire Department is happy to help, especially during Montana's wildland fire off-season, Missoula Fire Chief Jason Diehl said.

"In the summertime, it's a real balancing act to do what we can for our neighboring jurisdictions and other states but still retain the appropriate amount of resources for our local priorities," Diehl said. "When there's snow on the ground here, it makes the decision to send wildland resources out of state much easier."

In this case, Missoula firefighters ran the risk of being away from home during the holidays.

The response was no cost to Missoula citizens and, in fact, it brought in revenue for the City while also benefiting City firefighters by providing additional experience and training in diverse situations. The requesting agency pays firefighters' wages and equipment rental fees for engines. Since last July 1, wildland contracting has brought in \$1.1 million in reimbursements to the Missoula Fire Department, generating \$300,000 in revenue after expenses. Typically, these revenues go into the City's general fund the following year, but on occasion, with the blessing of the Missoula City Council, Diehl has purchased needed items for the fire department such as personal protective equipment for his firefighters, a trench rescue trailer and rescue watercraft.

In addition, firefighters get the reward of feeling good about their efforts to save property and lives in California. Missoula firefighters received many thanks from Santa Barbara area residents, including a thank you from Montecito, California, homeowner Jerry Eberhardt for saving his home – and for a firefighter leaving a note apologizing for breaking his front door handle and latch.

[http://missoulane.ws.com/news/the-polite-intruder-how-a-missoula-firefighter-earned-a-california/article\\_28f81528-fbd5-11e7-a425-174660054c57.html](http://missoulane.ws.com/news/the-polite-intruder-how-a-missoula-firefighter-earned-a-california/article_28f81528-fbd5-11e7-a425-174660054c57.html) Eberhardt later made a generous donation to the Missoula Firefighters Benevolent Fund, IAFF Local 271's charitable arm.

**For interviews, please contact:**

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