



# National Wildfire Suppression Association

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*Preserving and Protecting our Environment*

*Myths about the Industry*

1. **Myth – Private fire resources are more expensive to use.**

Fact: If you look at the cost per fire that may be true as our costs are all inclusive and the agencies are not. That means that the contractor bears the price of travel, training, and equipment as well as insurance needs. However if you look at the fire costs on an annual basis we are a great value as we are paid only for the time we are utilized, and the agency costs are amortized over a period of 180 days regardless how many days they actually provide fire suppression services. **We are a call when needed resource and paid only for our time on the line.**

2. **Myth – Private fire resources are unqualified and poorly trained.**

Fact: NWSA asked for and signed the first Memorandum of Understanding from the NWCG in 1993 giving us the authority to certify instructors that can provide training to contractor employees as well as federal, state and local government personnel. As part of this agreement our training program had to be approved and must meet or exceed the agency standards in the 310-1. NWSA developed and utilizes a web based database storage system that tracks the training done by all of our current 101 instructors. We also utilize independent third parties to randomly monitor the courses our instructors are teaching. In addition the PNWCG (Pacific NW Coordinating Group) randomly monitors these classes. NWSA holds annual training sessions for it's' instructors, and has a training committee that oversees these functions for NWSA in addition to a Training Coordinator that chairs that committee.

NWSA has provided training to the National Guard as well as a "Training Camp" for Oregon Department of Forestry. **We take this function seriously, and strive to provide the best training possible to help ensure the safety of our firefighters. You can view more info about our training program at <http://www.nwsa.us/training-program>. You can also view a copy of our MOU at <https://nwsa.publishpath.com/Websites/nwsa/Images/2011%20R6%20MOU0001.pdf>**

**3. Myth: Contractors are big businesses who are only concerned with making excessive amounts of money to take advantage of the American Taxpayer.**

Fact: Contractors are oftentimes very small family companies that live in rural communities and add to the employment opportunities and family wage jobs in these struggling areas of the U.S. The money they bring into the communities turns over at least 7 times and brings a much needed lifeline to them. Many of the small businesses are located in rural communities and are proud to provide assistance to help protect lives, homes as well as our natural resources. Most professional private Wildland fire service companies have spent their entire careers in the forest industry providing a variety of services. They live, play and care for our natural resources, and take their mission very seriously. They also take seriously the safety of the folks that they employ who are neighbors, friends and family from their surrounding rural communities. Professional Wildland Fire Service companies must also be astute business people as over a 10 year cycle there may only be four busy fire seasons, 3 normal seasons and 3 slow fire seasons, and they must manage their dollars to see them thru those 10 year cycles. They must follow multiple regulations including State and National OSHA standards, contractual requirements, EOC, Migrant & Seasonal Worker Protection Act (Crews), Department of Transportation, Department of Labor, and Service Contract Act among others.

4. **Myth: Contractors perform at a substandard level on the fireline.**

Fact: Contractors take their jobs very seriously and train every year to the highest NWCG standards to remain as safe and efficient as possible while providing the public with a needed service during natural disasters. We must meet or exceed all the same standards as the agency resources. NWSA has encouraged stricter monitoring of the private industry and worked hard to raise its standards. We have asked the agencies to incorporate things such as performance, company history and personnel capability into awarding the agreements. NWSA also pushed for stronger training requirements, and instructor monitoring and a true Best Value Contract that would guarantee the taxpayer and the agency highly trained, professional resources.

5. **Myth: Best Value contractors that provide ground resources are an unsafe on the line when compared to federal and state resources.**

Fact: If you look at the accident history for the past 10 years, you will see that there have been very few incidents on the line for the private Wildland fire services. The majority of accidents have been transportation related which is the biggest hazard for the industry. Why? Because when you are transporting crews in a vehicle and an accident occurs it can result in multiple injuries. Many of our contractors provide driver training as well as moving away from short base vehicles to minimize the risk. For Best Value Crew agreements the driver must be authorized under the Migrant Seasonal Work Protection Act (MSPA) including fingerprinting, and physical. Most contractors require drug testing and support drug free workplace programs. No company owner ever wants to meet with a family to announce an injury or fatality, and therefore safety is our members number one concern.

6. **Some contractors are fly by night, breaking all the rules in effort to make a buck.**

Fact: Just like any industry there are those that do try to find a way around the rules, however, NWSA members sign a Code of Ethics, and NWSA also provides a voluntary program "Contractor Certification Program" that partners with agencies like DOT and DOL as well as experts in Drug & Alcohol Training to educate our member companies in all regulations and requirements. We strive to "Raise the Bar" in the industry and we consider this a professional industry.