GET READY FOR AERIAL FIREFIGHTING NORTH AMERICA 2020

News / Events / Festivals

Aerial Firefighting North America 2020 Conference and Exhibition is the must-attend event for anyone involved in the aerial firefighting domain. Hosted at McClellan Conference Center in Sacramento, California between 4 and 5 March, the event features an array of presentations on a diverse range of subjects. California has been no stranger to wildfires in recent months and the conference programme for day one will see a wide range of presentations which reflect on them, and the accompanying aerial responses by those intimately involved. With Rear Admiral Terry Loughran, CB, FRAeS, Royal Navy as Chair the day kicks off with a series of keynote and welcoming addresses fromChief Thom Porter, Director of CAL FIRE; Brian S. Marshal, State Fire and Rescue Chief and Director of the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services and Jeffrey Rupert, Director of the Office of Wildland Fire in the US Department of the Interior. Delegates will also hear presentations from Dennis Brown, CAL FIRE's senior Chief of Aviation and Wayne Coulson, President and Chief Executive Officer of Canada's Coulson Aviation.

Challenges for pilots in the demanding aerial fire-fighting mission also come under the spotlight along with advances in airframe design with presentations from Viking Air and the Conair Group.

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The demanding nature of night-time aerial firefighting will round off day one: Representatives of the California National Guard will discuss military night-time air operations, while Eric Pacheco, SeniorPilot with the county of Los Angeles Fire Department will share his thoughts on night snorkelling. Mr. Pacheco's paper will provide a brief history of the department's air operations section with a primary emphasis on night aerial firefighting and the use of night vision goggles. His presentation will cover all the phases of the development and the processes used by the air operations section for night snorkelling, and the challenges tackled to implement this.

Commander Wayne Rigg, who overseas aviation innovation, capability and strategy for the County Fire Authority in Australia will discuss trials of night fire suppression operations. Cmdr. Rigg's presentation will detail the 2017/2018 Night Fire Suppression Operations (NFSO) Trial performed in the state of Victoria. This tested the ability to hover fill helicopters at night and the efficiency of night vision technology to attack fires from the air at a time when aircraft were previously required to be on the ground by last light. The trial provided an opportunity to utilise helicopters to extend daytime operations into the night and use the window of reduced fire behaviour to assist ground crews in suppressing fires. This trial had two phases the first of which was to obtain regulatory approval to undertake night vision firebombing. Phase 2 followed which marked the first time that night firebombing was undertaken on bushfires in Australia.

Day Two

With climate change and its effects dominating the news agenda, the second day of the conference kicks off with a look at the contribution rising temperatures are making vis-à-vis forest fires. Professor Johann Goldammer, Director of Germany's Global FireMonitoring Centre will give a keynote address on Global Warming and Landscape Fires. This will present a proposal to establish an international instrument for streamlining the governance of a coalition of national agencies, international organisations and the private sector. The initial proposal will be presented with regards to interoperability, common standard operating procedures; periods and areas of asset deployment; financial sustainability and a tentative timeline. Prof. Goldammer will be joined by Richard Alder, GeneralManager of Australia's National Aerial Firefighting Centre, who will reflect on that country's devastating 2019/2020 bushfires season and will ask whether such conflagrations will become the 'new normal"? Technology will also fall under the conference's gaze during day two with presentations on advanced fire retardant technology and the use of advanced firefighting liquids, fire intelligence and information systems and the growing interest in using Unmanned Aerial Vehicles to help combat wildfires. The session on new technological advances will include a presentation from Dan Reese, President of Global SuperTanker Services, who will reflect on his company's recent experiences performing aerial firefighting in the Amazon. Mr. Reese will discuss the challenges to aerial firefighting in terms of safety and logistics, examining the information aircrews need to fight fires, but which might not always be readily identified or available. He will argue that in today's age of new technology and the ever-present costs associated with aviation, no one country, state or government can afford an inexhaustible fleet of aerial firefighting platforms. As a result, he posits that the greatest collective challenge aerial firefighters face is standardisation: *"If we are to seamlessly integrate when assisting our neighbours, we must be prepared."* Mr. Reese will illustrate these issues with a case study examining the challenges and mitigations faced when a North American company answered the call to assist a South American country with aerial firefighting.

Recent experiences in aerial firefighting have witnessed the increased participation of military aircraft to assist these efforts. Lt Colonel Bradley G. Ross, Programme Manager for the Modular Airborne Firefighting System (MAFFS) from the US Air Force's 302nd Airlift Wing will examine the configuration and use of military aircraft in aerial firefighting. His presentation will cover a brief

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history of military aircraft use to this end focusing on how they have been re-purposed temporarily or permanently for this new mission. He will examine the specifics of the Lockheed Martin C-130 Hercules MAFFS configuration, how it is currently being used and its future potential, along with other military aircraft configurations currently employed as aerial firefighting platforms.

AFF North America 2020 attendees will be able to visit over 50 of the world's leading companies and organisations specialising in aerial firefighting during the exhibition which runs concurrently with the conference. Refreshment breaks, a drinks reception, and a conference dinner and awards ceremony will also offer excellent networking opportunities. Aerial Firefighting North America 2020 promises to the region's pre-eminent not-to-be-missed event for anyone involved in this key domain.

26 FEBRUARY 2020

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