

NEWS RELEASE

USDA Forest Service -- Northern Region



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MONTANA FIREFIGHTER SAFETY SPECIALIST HONORED

MISSOULA, Mont. Each spring, wildland firefighters bless and curse their respective agencies' rules as they strap on backpacks weighing 45 pounds and begin walking a 3-mile course. To pass the pack test, they must cross the finish line within 45 minutes. Each year firefighters must pass the test to ensure their fitness and earn qualifications for fireline work.

The pack test is one of many contributions of Dr. Brian Sharkey whose 45-year career was recognized in May with the 2009 Wildland Fire Safety Award presented by the International Association of Wildland Fire (IAWF). The IAWF is a non-profit, professional association representing members of the global wildland fire community.

The IAWF cited a lifetime of commitment to firefighter safety:

Dr. Sharkey has dedicated himself to the safety and wellbeing of wildland firefighters everywhere, by studying their health and performance and by providing science-based information to help firefighters on the line as well as for leaders making policy decisions.

Dr. Sharkey's award highlights a career dedicated to the physiological needs of firefighters to keep them safe and healthy in the rugged environment battling wildland fires. Sharkey has used his knowledge of physiology and fitness and his practical approach to solving problems. Often these studies were funded by the Forest Service and performed by University of Montana faculty or graduate students. In some cases, the United States military helped provide funding. Soldiers and wildland firefighters face a number of similar challenges in physical and mental stress.

Sharkey's studies resulted in a body of knowledge about:

- The health hazards of the smoke breathed by wildland firefighters
- Heat stress experienced by wildland firefighters
- Hydration needs of wildland firefighters
- Meals to help wildland firefighters get the energy they need
- Ergonomic tools to help wildland firefighters get the job done more efficiently and safely
- Adequate rest requirements for wildland firefighters
- Health and wellness for all Forest Service employees

Sharkey is a past president of the American College of Sports Medicine, the recipient of U.S. Department of Agriculture Superior Service and Distinguished Service Award, the recipient of a Forest Service Technology Transfer Award, and is the author or coauthor of numerous journal articles, Forest Service publications and books including three current titles on fitness, work capacity, and sports physiology published by *Human Kinetics*. Dr. Sharkey worked to improve the wellness, safety and performance of wildland firefighters since 1964 as a faculty member at the University of Montana where he is now Professor Emeritus. He is a respected researcher within the US Forest Service working at the Missoula Technology and Development Center's (MTDC) as the Project Leader for Wildland Firefighter Health and Safety.

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In this 1965 photo, a young Brian Sharkey (left) tests a smokejumper during a study of the energy required for wildland firefighting, the workload of the cardiovascular system, and the stresses of firefighters trying to cool their bodies during hard work in hot conditions.



Recent photograph of Dr. Brian Sharkey.