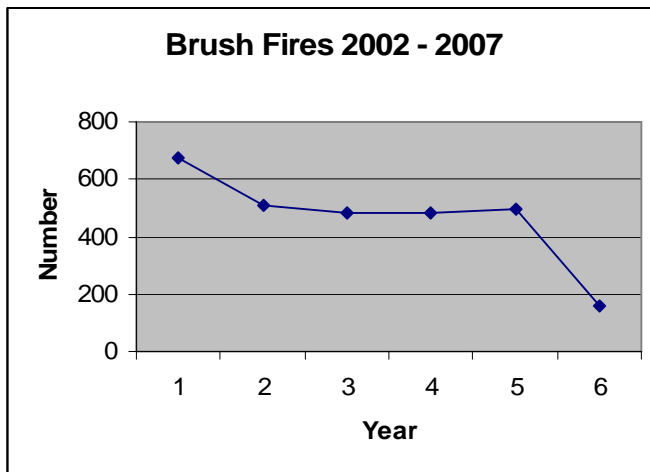


Brush Fires in Anchorage

Tracking Brush Fire Incidents

The following table shows the annual brush fire calls logged at the Anchorage Fire Department and reported to FireRMS for recent years. AFD has noted a significant decrease in the volume of brush fires since the onset of the Anchorage Wildfire Program, which formally started in 2001. The department attributes this correlation to the public awareness campaign supported by AFD and its partners in promoting Firewise and safe burning practices. Through this awareness, residents became more careful in their residential use of fire and subsequently, fewer fires grew out of control.



Year	Number
2002	673
2003	507
2004	483
2005	484
2006	495
2007	158
Total	2800

Brush Fire Response

Within the Municipality of Anchorage, three local firefighting agencies have primary response for fire suppression: Anchorage Fire Department, Girdwood Volunteer Fire Department and the Chugiak Volunteer Fire Department. In



the case of wildland fires, the State of Alaska Division of Forestry is the primary mutual aid responder along with other state, federal and military partners. This means that the local department will respond first and then request mutual aid resources as needed.

The Anchorage Fire Department maintains equipment and apparatus designed for wildland fire suppression along with regular training for firefighters and company officers. Ground based operations include progressive hose lay systems, water tenders, and portable tanks and water pumps to augment the water supply. A contract helicopter is added to AFDs fleet during the

wildland fire season. It is outfitted with a bucket for water drops and a flight crew to conduct fire size up and reconnaissance from this aerial platform. This expedient response is oftentimes an invaluable resource for firefighters on the ground: providing water and an “eye in the sky.”



In addition to maintaining top of the line response apparatus and well-trained firefighters, AFD reviews and updates the water resources catalogue annually. This list of drafting sites helps both rolling apparatus and the helicopter locate water during a wildland fire event.

Brush fires in the wildland-urban interface of the Municipality are the result of several very different ignition sources. They are often intentionally lit, but dry grass and other fuels cause fires to spread out of control of the user. In 2008, AFD has successfully suppressed

several significant brush fires that had the potential to spread to nearby homes. Some brush fires are likely caused by children playing with fire, as was evidenced in the Southport fire shown here. Unreported fire activity has also been noted around schools in the MOA.

As shown to the right, this unattended burn barrel on Upper Huffman caused a brush fire in May 2008. While burn barrels are inherently safer than open fires for residential burning of brush because they contain the flames, AFD continues to discourage their use because they are often the source of brush fires in the MOA and in the Matanuska - Susitna Valley. The user assumes a false sense of safety because the fire is contained within the barrel and often leaves the site unattended. Ventilation holes in the bottom of the barrel serve as escape ports for burning embers, lighting the adjacent grass or brush on fire. Additionally, not all burn barrels are fitted with a screen over the top opening. Radiant heat ignitions may also occur near burn barrels.



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Burn barrel use could be substantiated if all users complied with the safe burning guidelines, provided adequate clearance around the site, attended their fire for the duration of the burn period, and installed screens over the ventilation holes around the bottom and across the top of the barrel. Metal screening with ¼ inch or smaller grids should be used in this application.

Homeless and vagrant people cause many brush fires in the Municipality of Anchorage. These people often take refuge in black spruce stands that provide visual cover and protection from the weather.

Unfortunately, the black spruce foliage is highly combustible and ignites easily in dry conditions. The moss and Labrador tea common to this forest type supports fire due to its chemical composition and structure. The July 2, 2008 Piper Fire was ignited by a homeless person and burned 10 acres adjacent to subdivisions near Tudor Road and Lake Otis Parkway.



The Piper Fire was ignited by a homeless person camp near the yellow circle. The Division of Forestry's air tanker dropped retardant to keep the fire from spreading further west toward more homes, as shown in the orange oval. This image shows the burned area looking north to the homes on Grumman and Piper Streets.

AFD responded to the fire with engines and firefighters, setting up the Incident Command Post (ICP) at the south end of Piper Street. Due to the complexity of the fire with regard to size, potential for growth, and proximity to homes, a unified command structure was implemented with AFD and Division of Forestry under Incident Commanders John Adamson and Phil Blydenberg, serving for their respective agencies. On the fire line, AFD implemented full use of progressive hose lays from portable water tanks in addition to using float-a-pumps in Campbell Creek to provide water to the further reaches of the fire. Operations Chief John Huxley directed

the suppression efforts through field coordination with AFD, Division of Forestry and Alaska Fire Service personnel.

Wildfire Mitigation Office staff supported the fire suppression efforts in operations, plans and information. Jason Kohler supported Rotor 1 operations as the aviation manager at ICP. Forester Sue Rodman and Battalion Chief Tom Kempton provided field escorts for the media onto the fire line. Rodman and Kohler also provided fuels and weather observations to the media and the unified Incident Command. Fire Education Specialist Jennifer Klugh remained at ICP to support the command staff and provide media interviews. Klugh returned to the scene the following day to provide tours of the burn area and facilitate timely postings of the fire incident for print, television and radio news.



AFD Forester Sue Rodman approaches Incident Command at the Piper Fire to support media on the fire line.

Firefighter Landon Forth works the line during the Piper Incident. Along with other AFD firefighters, he helped flank the fire with water and tools. This is the hard work of beating out fire in the mossy understory and roots of the black spruce forest.



Piper Fire, Anchorage – July 2, 2008

A similar project and fire event occurred in Anchorage near Piper Street on July 2, 2008. AFD treated Municipal park land along Campbell Creek directly adjacent to several subdivisions in 2005 - 2006. Additionally, MOA Park's Trail Watch program treated the trail corridor between Grumman and Bragaw. The area is forested with dense black spruce that can support intense and fast moving fire.

Ignited by a homeless person's campfire, the Piper Fire burned 10 acres of park land. Fortunately, winds were calm and fire spread was slow. AFD firefighters and Rotor 1 flight crew were supported by Division of Forestry firefighters, helicopter and air tanker along with BLM Alaska Fire Service smokejumpers. AFDs Rotor 1 dropped 43 buckets on the fire. The Division of Forestry air tanker secured lines along the perimeter and head of the fire.

A homeless person campfire was the ignition source for the Piper Fire, burning 10 acres of Municipal park land.



Division of Forestry air tanker dropped retardant on the Piper Fire to keep the flames from spreading to nearby subdivisions.

The Piper Fire burned 10 acres on July 2, 2008. Downtown Anchorage lies in the background to the north.



Homes stay safe to the north of the Piper Fire.



Rotor 1 dropped 43 buckets of water on the Piper Fire on July 2, 2008.



AFDs Wildfire Mitigation Office coordinated a forest treatment project on the north perimeter of Campbell Park in 2005 – 2006. Division of Forestry crews treated 150 feet of black and white spruce at the edge of the subdivision between Grumman and Piper Streets. MOA Trail Watch thinned black spruce along the trail corridor to Elmore.



Just south of the Piper Fire, a homeless person's fire ignited a brush fire, burning over 2 acres near the east end of Dowling in 2003. AFD firefighters and helicopter were on scene immediately to extinguish the flames. No homes were lost.