



For Informational Purposes

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CDCR's Conservation Camp Program Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What is CDCR's conservation camp program?

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), in cooperation with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) and the Los Angeles County Fire Department (LAC FIRE), jointly operates 43 conservation camps located in 27 counties. All camps are minimum-security facilities and all are staffed with correctional staff. The camps house as many as 220 fire crews and up to 4,000 inmates who are permanently assigned to a camp. All camps are minimum-security facilities and all are staffed with correctional officers. Most are located strategically in rural areas so that crews can respond quickly to a fire.

When did the program start?

CDCR has safely assigned thousands of inmates to fire camps since 1946. Their primary mission is to support state, local and federal government agencies as they respond to all types of emergencies such as fires, floods, and other natural or manmade disasters. The fire camp program has proven to be very successful since its inception, as participants assist with a vital public service. The fire camp program helps inmates build skills in firefighting, including positively working in a team environment.

How many inmates are assigned to conservation camps?

In 2018, there were approximately 3,700 inmates working at fire camps currently. Approximately 2,600 of those were fire line-qualified inmates. In addition to inmate firefighters, camp inmates can work as support staff for the camps.

Are there female or young adult conservation camps?


There are three female camps: Malibu #13, Puerta La Cruz #14, and Rainbow #2. Pine Grove Youth Conservation Camp, houses only low-risk classification wards between the ages of 18-25 from CDCR's Division of Juvenile Justice.

What type of training do fire camp firefighters receive?

All fire camp firefighters receive the same training that Cal Fire's seasonal firefighters receive, which includes a week of classroom instruction and a second week of field exercises. When not fighting fires, inmate firefighters perform conservation and community service projects.

What is their schedule?

Fire camp firefighters work Monday through Friday for eight hours a day performing a wide range of duties, such as clearing brush and fallen trees to reduce the chance of fire, maintaining parks, sand bagging, flood protection and reforestation. The



conservation projects are determined by CAL FIRE. Prior to the start of a project, CDCR staff members evaluate the project site to ensure there are no security issues. During a major wildfire or emergency situation, inmate firefighter crews are based in command centers alongside CAL FIRE staff crews. They typically work in 24-hour shift rotations.

How much are fire camp inmates paid?

Inmate firefighters have an average of \$2 per day, and receive an additional \$1 per hour in an active fire. Taxpayers pay an average of \$81,458 (FY 2018-19) in living expenses per year, per inmate. This includes their health and dental care, food, security, as well as education and other rehabilitative opportunities.

Do they earn time off their sentences for working in a fire camp?

Yes. Most inmate firefighters receive 2-for-1 credits – meaning they receive two additional days off their sentence for every one day they serve as a firefighter. Inmates who have violent conviction offenses (falling under Penal Code 667.5(c)) receive day-for-day credits – or one day off their sentence for every one day they serve as a firefighter. Offenders serving in fire camps who are not firefighters receive day-for-day credits – or one day off their sentence for every one day they serve in a fire camp.

How are participants selected for the fire camp program?

An inmate must volunteer for the fire camp program; no one is involuntarily assigned to work in a fire camp. They must have non-violent behavior and conformance to rules while they are incarcerated. The conservation camps only take minimum-custody inmates, and they are screened and medically cleared on a case-by-case basis before being accepted into the program. They are screened on physical, emotional, and intellectual aptitudes, and potential crew members are evaluated twice for physical fitness training by a custodial agency and by Cal Fire.

Are there any disqualifiers for the program?


Any inmate can apply for the fire camp program, but not every inmate can be eligible. Inmates must have minimum custody status, a status based on good behavior, conforming to prison rules, and participating in rehabilitative programs. Each inmate is evaluated individually to ensure that all those selected for the camp program are willing to be team members with nonviolent behavior, even if their original conviction was for a violent crime. Disqualifiers include inmates who have committed arson, rape, or sex offenses, as well as those with active warrants, medical issues, or whose cases are of high notoriety.

Can a fire camp firefighter file for benefits if they are injured?

Yes. Each inmate firefighter is entitled to workers' compensation benefits for injuries sustained during work, and/or if those injuries result in proximate death. The families of inmate firefighters may file a claim for death benefits in the event that the inmate dies from work-related injuries. The injury sustained must meet certain conditions for approval, as outlined in California Labor Code 3370.

Can inmate firefighters receive employment as firefighters after their release?

[There have been cases where former inmates have gained employment with Cal Fire.](#)
In an effort to expand employment opportunities, CDCR, in partnership with Cal Fire



and the California Conservation Corps, began a Firefighter Training and Certification Program for participants at the Ventura Training Center (VTC), located at the Ventura Conservation Camp (VCC), in Ventura County. The pilot program began this fall, and trainees are former offenders on parole supervision who have recently been part of a trained firefighting workforce housed in the fire camps or CDCR institution firehouses. VTC will provide firefighter training, certifications and job readiness support to create a pathway for former offenders to compete for entry-level firefighting jobs with the state.