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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The "*Reporter's Guide to Wildland Fire*" is available at: [www.fusee.org](http://www.fusee.org)

## **"We need to learn how to live with wildland fire"**

### **Wildland Firefighters Seek to "Change the Debate"**

**NATIONAL FIREFIGHTERS' GROUP RELEASES**

**"A REPORTER'S GUIDE TO WILDLAND FIRE"**

**PORTLAND, OR** -- News stories about wildland fires often follow scripts verging on sensationalist hype and hysteria, according to "*A Reporter's Guide to Wildland Fire*," released today by **Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics, and Ecology (FUSEE)**, a national firefighters' group.

"The largest, most severe wildfires provide reporters with all the elements needed for exciting news stories: Crisis and conflict, drama and suspense, death and destruction," the *Guide* reads. "Wildfire stories also carry a readymade template for framing the story, identifying the main characters, and describing the unfolding events."

"The net result may produce riveting stories, but this misses an opportunity to more accurately and fully inform the public with the facts," said Timothy Ingalsbee, the country's foremost fire sociologist and author of the *Guide*. "Rather than being villains, wildland fires are natural disturbances that have affected forest ecosystems for millennia," he said. "Reporters do great service to the public when they break free from standard scripts and official sources that typically depict wildfire events with war metaphors and 'catastrophe' mentalities."

"Military metaphors, ecological illiteracy, inaccurate terminology, and biased sources relegate most wildfire reporting as hackneyed," Ingalsbee continued. "We're trying to constructively change the debate. '*A Reporter's Guide to Wildland Fire*' scientifically addresses fire myths and offers new story angles, expanded information sources, better word choices, and more appropriate questions to ask agency spokespersons in order to improve the accuracy and value of fire reporting."

Among the "myths" the *Guide* tackles are: "We can prevent wildfires and fireproof our forests;" "Commercial logging and forest road-building help prevent wildfires;" "Recent summers have been the worst wildfire seasons in history;" and "Most wildfires burn in densely forested areas of National Forests." The *Guide* also suggests new terminologies, such as "high-severity wildland fires," instead of "loaded terms" like "catastrophic wildfires."

Dr. Ingalsbee, a former firefighter and a nationally-recognized writer on wildland fire, was joined at Monday's Portland news conference by Rich Fairbanks, the nation's most experienced fire management planner; Stephen Clarke, an expert trainer of firefighters and crewbosses; and Joseph Fox, a Ph.D. forest entomologist and forest health expert with 23 years' experience as a firefighter and smokejumper.

"We're here to offer the public new perspectives on wildland fires, and the related issues of public information, safety, ethics, economics, and environmental protection," said Fairbanks, a fire planner with the U.S. Forest Service.

"There is a natural partnership between rural property owners who depend on firefighters to protect their homes in the event of wildfire, and wildland firefighters who depend on homeowners to create defensible space on their properties," Fairbanks said. "Homeowners support FUSEE's vision for fire policy reform because we don't want to see unethical waste of taxpayer resources or degradation of property values by inappropriate fire suppression or fuels reduction actions."

Clarke, a lead instructor for the Oregon Firefighting Contractor's Association, said, "We need to learn how to live with wildland fire. Our current fire policies are wasting taxpayer dollars, damaging natural resources, and putting firefighters' lives at unnecessary risk. **FUSEE** is firefighters standing up and speaking out for the highest possible safety standards."

Fox, a veteran Forest Service smokejumper and **FUSEE** board member, said the new organization of wildland firefighters "stands for a new ethos that links improvement in firefighter and community safety with ecological restoration of public lands and ethical use of taxpayer dollars and resources." "Firefighters who work on the frontlines and see the need for changes in policy sometimes face retaliation and reprisals in their workplaces if they speak out," said Fox. "There is an urgent need for this organization to help get practical information to reporters, the public and policymakers."

**FUSEE** (pronounced FEW-zee) is a national nonprofit organization founded in 2004 that is dedicated to uniting wildland firefighters to promote safe, ethical, and ecological fire management. **FUSEE** is an affiliate of **PEER**, or Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility.

Members of **FUSEE** include current and former wildland firefighters, other fire professionals, rural homeowners, and other citizens supportive of the group's mission and activities. A "fusee" is a quick-igniting, handheld torch used by firefighters to secure firelines, create safety zones, reduce hazardous fuel loads, and restore fire-adapted ecosystems.

The "*Reporter's Guide to Wildland Fire*" is available at: [www.fusee.org](http://www.fusee.org)

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Timothy Ingalsbee, Ph.D. is the executive director of Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics, and Ecology (**FUSEE**), and is a former wildland firefighter for the U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service. Ingalsbee is a nationally recognized writer and speaker on wildland fire ecology and management issues that link firefighter safety with community protection and ecological restoration. Ingalsbee directed the Western Fire Ecology Center for the American Lands Alliance from 1997 to 2004. In 2002, Ingalsbee was appointed by Oregon Governor Kitzhaber to serve on the Western Governors' Association's collaborative stakeholder group that developed the Implementation Plan and Performance Measures for the Ten-Year Comprehensive Strategy and National Fire Plan. He currently serves on the Western Governor's Association's Forest Health Advisory Committee. In 2003, Ingalsbee was elected to secretary of the board of directors for the nonprofit Association for Fire Ecology. Ingalsbee is also an adjunct professor in the Environmental Studies Department at the University of Oregon, and teaches a seminar on Forests, Fires and Society.

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