

The Challenge of Developing Technical Fire Management Skills in Latin America¹

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Abstract

It has been observed that the bodies, organizations, groups and people responsible for fire management often leave aside, do not value or discourage investment in human capital through the development of technical skills, commonly holding the view that it is a non-refundable expense. Added to this problem is the constant turnover in experienced and trained personnel, due to changes in administration, problems in management-leadership and hiring mechanisms with casual or temporary modalities.

The foregoing generates operational structures that function and deliver results, but more due to the will, motivation and conviction of the firefighters whose safety is put at risk. Moreover, many times there is a lack of productive and effective use of material, human and financial resources, creating a permanent vicious cycle of initial operation, repeating the early stages of integration, team building, basic training and initial experimentation, which does not allow for or hinders the professionalization of the wildfire fighter and fire management technicians.

This is a challenge that requires attention from different perspectives with the participation, will and support of people at all levels of the administration: fire management programs, governmental bodies and environmental agencies.

So what can we do? The decades-long experience of the USAID-USFS can be taken as a reference and basis with its respective adaptation to the social, political, economic and ecological conditions of each country.

There are processes, instruments and management and/or coordination mechanisms, such as a Fire Management Policy in accordance with laws, regulations and decrees, which will allow for the creation of long-term strategic planning with the establishment of a Fire Management Strategy; this, in turn, will foster the preparation and implementation of annual inter-agency operational programs. The design, agreement on and operation of a Certification System based on the Incident Command System with standardized, phased-in training accompanied by task books that accredit the experience and physical fitness tests will promote

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the safety of the personnel and enhance the professionalization of the activity of the firefighter and fire management technician.