

INSARAG
August 29-September 6, 2000

Representatives of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) and German Fire Officials visited the National Interagency Fire Center to observe and learn about our operations at the height of a fire season unlike any we have experienced in decades. They were representing the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The group consisted of five German nationals: Richard van Hazebrouk, Team Leader, German Federal Agency for Technical Relief; Karl-Heinz Frank, Fire and Rescue Expert, Frankfurt am Main Fire Brigade; Jurgen Helmdach, Fire Chief, State of Brandenburg; Dr. Tobias Zorn, Global Fire Monitoring Center, Freiburg; and Harald Krahmuller, German Border Police Officer and helicopter water bombing expert. The group spent two days at NIFC, where they received orientations on the Incident Command System. They also attended the morning briefings. The visitors then went on the Clear Creek Incident where they spent four days studying ICS field operations.

Heather Lonigro, on detail to International Programs, escorted the team to the Clear Creek Incident. The team was greeted at the Salmon National Forest headquarters by Judy Carevelho, the Fire Business Manager, and a team of Fire Information Officers who briefed them on the fire situation and its complexity. The team participated in the IC briefings and planning meetings and were briefed on all aspects of fire operations. Dr. Zorn was able to spend a day and a half shadowing the rehabilitation team on field assignments. Harald Krahmuller, a helicopter pilot, also had the opportunity to spend an extensive period of time at the helibase and on reconnaissance flights with one of the contract helicopter pilots.



The INSARAG Team on the fire line

A visit to the fire line was arranged, and the team was able to observe and take part in mop-up operations with the marine battalion assigned to the Clear Creek Incident. They were also able to observe retardant operations at a remote helispot. The last day was spent in discussion with Paul Hefner and his Type I team on all aspects of fire suppression operations.



Paul Hefner accepting an ornamental plaque from INSARAG



Paul Hefner posing with the INSARAG Team

The INSARAG team was especially interested in the management system and organizational structure associated with running such a large operation. Germany has very few forest fires, and none of such size. However, according to Richard van Hazebrouck, the group leader, the team was very impressed with the Incident Command System and will make their findings available to the international community to assist developing countries facing similar critical wildland fire situations. In addition, fire officials will explore opportunities for future cooperation.