

Company News

Grayback Bases of Operations: Merlin, OR 541 476 0033 Medford, OR 541 830 3100 LaGrande, OR 541 963 6568
John Day, OR 541 575 1501 Boise, ID 208 345 8833 Missoula MT 406 721 5358

ATTN MEDIA: You have permission to use the photos below with credit to/courtesy of Grayback Forestry.

Statements & Releases

Update on the return of the remains (08/25/08 - 18:00 PST)

Update on return of Grayback Crews to the Fire Line (08/18/08 - 14:00 PST)

Update confirming release of Frohreich and Brown on August 10. (08/11/08 - 09:00 PST)

Update on Missing Firefighters (08/08/08 - 12:00 PST)

Statement from Mike Wheelock (08/07/08)

Initial Statement of Injured Firefighters (08/06/08 - 14:30 PST)

FALLEN FIREFIGHTERS RETURN HOME

August 25, 2008 – 18:00 PST - The remains of Grayback Forestry's seven fallen firefighters will be returned to the arms of their families Tuesday, August 26 – their final return home. After Forrest Funeral Home in Weaverville, Calif. releases them, Grayback President Mike Wheelock will transport them to airports in Medford, Eugene and North Bend to bring them home to their loved ones. The remains of Roark Schwanenburg also will be flown to Medford where Carson Helicopter will fly him to his home in Lostine, Oregon. Jim Ramage's remains will be returned to his family in Redding by Forrest Funeral Home.

The quiet, respectful transfer will be made without special ceremony and no interviews will be given.

“The Tribute on August 15 was a beautiful public recognition of their sacrifice and a celebration of who they were,” said Mike Wheelock. “What we are doing today is a very personal moment between us and their families. We are bringing them home.”

Shawn Blazer, Matthew Hammer, Scott Charlson, Edrik Gomez, Caleb Renno, David Steele, and Bryan Rich exemplified the bravery and skill of the wildland firefighter. We will never forget them.

Approximate times of arrival.

Medford Jet Center South – 2:00 pm

Eugene-- Flight Craft 90454 Boeing Drive – 3:30 pm

North Bend – 4:30 – 5:30 pm

The flight centers will have an area set up for media. Leslie Habetler will be on scene to answer questions.

Medford, Ore. – August 18, 2008 – On Monday, August 18, six Grayback Forestry crews and eight engines were dispatched to fight fires.

While two crews remain in stand down, Grayback’s firefighters are ready to return to the fire lines.

“We are grateful we had the opportunity to honor our fallen firefighters on Friday,” says Grayback Forestry President Mike Wheelock. “But the fires across the west are still burning. The best tribute that our firefighters can give their fallen comrades is to go do the best job they can. They are well-trained and ready to go back to the lines.”

Crews are being deployed from Merlin, Medford, John Day and La Grande, Ore. bases.

About:

For nearly thirty years, Grayback Forestry has provided resources and services to clients such as USFS, BLM, USF&W, private lumber companies, and private landowners. Our highly trained and experienced staff have expertise in wildland fire suppression, fuels management, forestry, prescribed fire and other emergency services.

Update August 17, 2008 - 16:00 PST - Grayback Crews Ready to Head Back to Fire Lines

Merlin, Ore. - August 17, 2008 – Grayback Forestry announced today that crews from Merlin, John Day and La Grande, Ore. and Missoula, Mont. bases are available for dispatch as of Monday, August 18. Upon dispatch notice, requested crews will roll out within an hour.

The Medford, Ore. crews will have one more week of stand-down time before being available for dispatch.

Grayback Forestry employs between 350 and 400 people during the busy summer months. It supplies hand crews, engines and tenders to fight wildland fire.

UPDATE August 11, 2008 - 09:00 PST - Jonathon Frohreich and Michael Brown were released from UC Davis Medical Center on Sunday August 10.

Authorities have finished collecting the remains of the victims.

You can read more detail in the Associated Press coverage from Sacramento.

UPDATE August 8, 2008 - 12:00 PST - Ten Grayback Forestry firefighters were on board when a helicopter went down near Junction City, Calif. on August 5, 2008. Three of the ten survived and are still hospitalized. Seven of the firefighters are missing and are presumed to have perished in the crash.

Grayback Forestry officials spent the day on Wednesday working to notify families of the missing firefighters.

The following are the names of the missing firefighters whose families have been contacted. As soon as we have contacted the family of the seventh firefighter, we will update.

Shawn Blazer, 30 from Medford, Ore.
Scott Charleson, 25 from Phoenix, Ore.
Matthew Hammer, 23 from Grants Pass, Ore.
Edrik Gomez, 19, from Ashland, Ore.
Steven Renno, 21, Cave Junction, Ore
Bryan Rich, 29, from Medford, Ore.
David Steele, 19, from Ashland, Ore.

You can find their photos on the Web site: www.graybackforestry.com along with those of the surviving firefighters.

Our focus continues to be to support our employees and to help the families in anyway we can.

“We are devastated by this,” says Mike Wheelock, owner of Grayback Forestry. “We train long and hard to make sure our crews are safe on the fire line. This kind of tragedy is something you just can’t plan for.”

The remainder of the affected crew who served with the missing men are due to arrive back to the Medford base this week. We will be providing incident debriefing and other support as needed to all of our crews.

All Grayback resources from the Iron Complex are en route back to their home base. No crews remain on the fire.

According to UC Davis Medical Center, Michael Brown’s condition is fair and Jonathon Frohreich remains in serious condition. Rick Schroeder, at Mercy Medical Center in Redding, remains in critical condition.

We would like to extend our appreciation to members of the clergy, law enforcement and Forest Service who accompanied our representatives to inform the families.

Photos courtesy of Grayback Forestry.

Shawn Blazer

Scott Charleson

Matthew Hammer

Edrik Gomez

Steven (Caleb) Renno

Bryan Rich

David Steele

Statement from Mike Wheelock

August 7, 2008 - 16:24 PST: Statement given earlier today at Mercy Medical Center in Redding, California

Good Afternoon, my name is Mike Wheelock and I am the President of Grayback Forestry.

I am visiting with you today as a President but mostly as a brother and a representative to my employee firefighters and their families.

We have been forever affected by the accident that occurred within the Trinity Alps earlier this week.

First of all, I want to thank everyone who has helped to rescue and care for these firefighters.

The responsiveness of all agencies and medical personnel has been tremendous.

I and my team are in the process of contacting all of the affected employees' families. We appreciate everyone's support in letting us talk with them before we publicly release the names of their loved ones.

Here is what I can tell you.

This was a tragic accident that resulted in three injured and seven missing firefighters.

Two of the injured are at UC Davis Medical Center in Sacramento and one is at Mercy Medical Center in Redding. The families are with all the injured.

We have almost completed the process of notifying the families of the missing firefighters. I ask and plead with you to let us get through the healing process, including the notification of our families and the care of the injured and our employees.

We mobilized chaplains and incident management teams to help the families. We are also working closely with the US Forest Service and other related agencies to meet the needs of the families and affected employees.

Ten firefighters from our company were part of a 20-person organized crew that was working in steep/remote terrain on the Shasta Trinity National Forest on the Iron/Alps complex.

For four days, prior to the accident, the crew had been successfully and heroically defending a section of critical line that had to be held to avoid serious, long-term problems. The weather had changed and the firefighters were being evacuated off the mountainside. The first 10-person crew was successfully transported to base camp and the helicopter returned for the remaining part of the crew. And then the accident occurred.

Many of our crews are standing down and have returned home. They are experiencing great grief about the missing and those who are injured.

I'd like to say the entire fire community is one big family and all are affected when one is affected. The agencies, contractors and all the support people risk their lives every day fighting these fires. Please keep us in your thoughts and prayers during this summer because it is still early in the fire season.

I have just visited with Rick Schroeder who is a patient here at Mercy. He is doing well. He is alert and surrounded by his family and loved ones. He wants to thank everyone who has been caring for him. He'd like some time to heal both mentally and physically and then will consider sharing his story with others.

While many of us are in our safe houses, these firefighters are risking their lives for us every day. Once again, on behalf of Grayback Forestry and its family of firefighters, thank you for all of the concern and support you have extended to us. Please keep all of the firefighters and their families in your thoughts and prayers.

08/06/2008 - 14:30 pm PST - Three Confirmed Injured in Helicopter Crash on Iron Complex Fire

Three Confirmed Injured in Helicopter Crash on Iron Complex Fire

August 6, 2008 – 14:00 PST - Grayback Forestry, Inc. was saddened to learn that three of its wildland firefighters were injured in a helicopter crash on Tuesday, August 5 when their transport helicopter went down in a remote location about 15 miles northwest of Junction City, Calif.

Michael Brown, 20, and Jonathan Frohreich, 18, were transported to the University of California Davis Medical Center in Sacramento. Rick Schroeder*, 42, was admitted to Mercy Medical Center in Redding, Cal. The condition and extent of their injuries is unknown at this time.

Grayback Forestry, Inc. is working hard taking care of its employees and their families and will continue to provide information as it becomes available. The company asks that you please visit the Grayback Web site for updates: www.graybackforestry.com. We will continue to release current information as we know it.

About:

For nearly thirty years, Grayback Forestry has provided resources and services to clients such as USFS, BLM, USF&W, private lumber companies, and private landowners. Our highly trained and experienced staff have expertise in wildland fire suppression, fuels management, forestry, prescribed fire and other emergency services.

* Please note correction in spelling of Schroeder.

Jonathon Frohreich

Richard Schroeder

Michael Brown