

## **Associate Member Package**

### Information for NSA Associate Members

#### **What Is A Smokejumper?**

Smokejumpers are wildland firefighters dropped by parachute in the vicinity of a fire. Smokejumping was developed as a means of quickly reaching and making initial attack on fires in remote areas. The program was started in 1940 and has been in operation since. There are approximately 400 jumpers in the United States, so the number is low compared to the number of other types of wildland firefighters.

The primary mission of smokejumpers is fire fighting. In addition to airplanes, smokejumpers may be delivered to a fire via helicopter, vehicles and by foot. Smokejumpers are a national resource and are occasionally used as a 20-person Type I Crew.

Smokejumpers are typically dispatched to fires on federal land but can be used on private property, which is not uncommon in Alaska. They frequently travel to other regions of the country as needed.

#### **What Do Smokejumpers Do?**

A typical jumper fire can vary in size and is usually located in mountainous terrain far from roads or easy access. Depending on the number and size of the fires, two to sixteen smokejumpers suit up quickly, load the airplane, and fly to the fire. A “Spotter” selects a safe jump spot, judges the wind and when the jumpers will exit the aircraft. After the jumpers reach the ground, cargo boxes are dropped with tools, food, and firefighting equipment. The jumpers then control and mop-up the fire. Smokejumpers are expected to remain on the fire until it is out or until the host unit makes a decision to release them.

Most fires fought by the smokejumpers are small. The idea is to make a quick initial attack and control the fire before it can spread. Two jumpers can put out a fire in its early stages preventing it from becoming a blaze that requires many people and millions of dollars to put out.

When not on fire duty, jumpers work around their base at various tasks that might include parachute rigging and repair, fire training, and gear maintenance. Physical training is a very important part of the job and daily workouts are required. When fire activity is low, project work away from the bases may include trail improvement and work on district projects.

Smokejumpers are paid for a normal 40-hour workweek with overtime and hazard pay when on fires.

## **What Is The Job Like?**

During a typical season, a jumper might fight 5-15 fires. During a busy year, the activity can be almost nonstop. Other years the jumpers will be lucky to jump a couple fires a season. Each season is a question mark. Working the fireline is extremely physically demanding. It is not uncommon to construct fireline for 12-16 hours a day on a continuing basis.

Because the work is often extremely physically demanding, all jumpers must be in excellent condition. Both strength and endurance are of utmost importance to the job. A medical examination is required of all smokejumper applicants to ensure ability to work irregular and extended work hours. Check the listed web sites for physical and work-experience requirements.

## **How Does One Become A Smokejumper?**

The following web sites provide information on the nine smokejumper bases and the requirements for the job.

U.S. Forest Service Smokejumpers

<http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/people/smokejumpers/>  
[www.fs.fed.us/r6/oka/fire/ncsb/index.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/oka/fire/ncsb/index.shtml)

Bureau of Land Management Smokejumpers

<http://www.alaskasmokejumpers.com/>  
<http://www.fire.blm.gov/smokejumper/>  
<http://www.nifc.gov/nifctour/smoke.html>

## **Other Site**

[www.spotfireimages.com/](http://www.spotfireimages.com/)

Photo-essays of wildland firefighting, including smokejumping and hotshot crews by Alaska Smokejumper and photographer Mike McMillan.