

Building a Foundation for Learning: The Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center in the United States

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This presentation will focus on the first five years since the establishment of the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center in Tucson, Arizona as well as the strategic direction for the Center in the next five years.

The need for a U.S. Lessons Learned Center had its roots in the Firefighter Safety Awareness Study, initiated after the 14 firefighter fatalities in the 1994 South Canyon Fire in Colorado. Although originally proposed as a Center to focus on firefighter safety, early surveys of the firefighter community indicated a desire for the Center to take a more 'holistic' approach by looking at organizational learning in wildland fire and its organizational culture. As the Center organized in 2002, it knew it needed to benchmark other lessons learned centers to learn their foundational lessons and what practices worked and which ones they should avoid. A formal benchmarking trip was taken to the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) in Ft. Leavenworth, KS to study their state of the art collection and analysis process. Key recommendations made by CALL were to:

1. Adopt an organizational structure that prevents the Center from becoming entrenched in a governmental or organizational bureaucracy. This is necessary to facilitate a free flowing exchange of knowledge as lessons and effective practices.
2. Ensure that the analysis component of the Center is adequately staffed so the information that is collected can be analyzed in a timely fashion to share with the fire community.

Recently, the LLC embarked on its first strategic planning process to set a strategic vision for 2012. The new mission states that the Lessons Learned Center actively promotes a learning culture to enhance and sustain safe and effective work practices in the entire U.S. wildland fire community. The Center provides opportunities and resources to foster collaboration among all fire professionals. We facilitate their networks, provide access to state-of-the-art learning tools, and bridge the gap between learning and training.