

Training is intense

Volunteer firefighters provide hazardous community service

By LISA BOONSTOPPEL-POT
The Herald

To an outsider, the pile of burning skids is just that - a pile of burning skids. But to volunteers with the Halton Hills Fire Department, the skids represent a shed engulfed in flames which is threatening the safety of a nearby house and a fuel truck parked just metres away.

That's the scenario Georgetown firefighters faced Thursday night while practicing rural firefighting techniques as part of their weekly Thursday night practices on the grounds of the Georgetown fire station on Maple Avenue.

Acton firefighters team at the Acton station on Bower Avenue, Monday nights.

Acting Captain Jim Manning supervised the training session and explained the biggest problem in a rural firefighting situation is the lack of water.

"The first truck to arrive on the scene is the pumper which only contains 2,000 litres of water," he said. "When they arrive on the scene, they have to decide how they're going to use this small supply of water until the tanker,

which holds 11,000 litres of water, arrives.

"In this instance, the firefighters may decide to use the water to protect themselves while they go inside the home to check and see if anyone is inside," he said. "But they also have to consider where the sparks are blowing because there is a tanker gas truck on the premise."

The Captain at the scene also has to decide how to position the pumper so there's room to connect the tanker to the pumper when it arrives, said Captain Manning.

At the practice, Captain John Wilson directed his men to use the water to extinguish the blaze at the home and wait for the tanker to combat the fire destroying the shed.

Rural firefighting tactics is just one of the areas volunteers are trained in, said Halton Hills Department's part-time training officer, Bob Meads, who drafts the training schedule, along with the district fire chief and the chief designate.

Two types of training schedules are drafted - one for the new

recruits and one for firefighters who have passed the recruit training schedule.

The Halton Hills Fire Department accepts new recruits in the spring after they've passed a physical and medical test, and they undergo six months of training which begins with a general indoctrination of the fire department and an explanation of what's expected of them, said Mr. Meads.

"Next, we move on to equipment familiarity which is to basically teach the recruits to associate names with the pieces of equipment," said Mr. Meads. "It's their initial role in the fire department to help the firefighters who know what they're doing by acting as tool carriers or gophers."

Once they're familiar with the equipment and know how to operate it, to respond as the third man in a pumper crew which means getting the hoses ready at a fire scene and assisting the other four crew members, he said.

The last part of their training involves using the breathing ap-

paratus equipment and once they've mastered the breathing apparatus training, they are considered experienced enough to combat fires, said Mr. Meads.

But the training doesn't stop. Recruits join the experienced firefighters in training under Captains in learning ventilation procedures, high angle rescues, defensive driving, use of nozzles and streams, auto extrication,

ropes and knots, hazardous material training, residential and high-rise pre-planning, salvage, cardio-pulmonary respiration and first-aid, and fire alarm systems.

Currently, Captains at the Georgetown station are training 38 volunteers and have the capacity to train 45 volunteers. The Acton station has the maximum number of volunteers needed, 35.



In the eyes of these Halton Hills firefighters, the piles of burning skids are actually a shed and house burning up on a rural property and they have to decide how to effectively use the limited water supply available. The fire scene was set up by Halton

Hills Fire Department Captains to teach volunteers rural firefighting techniques at last Thursday's practice. Halton Hills firefighters practice firefighting, lifesaving and rescue techniques weekly. (Herald photo)

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