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Firefighters Benefit from IAFF's New Online Solar Training

03/17/2017



Scenario: It's 1600 hours, and you've just been dispatched to a residential kitchen fire. First on the scene, you notice solar panels on the roof.

Are you prepared? What are your concerns? If the fire spreads to the roof, can you apply water to energized solar panels? Do you know how to safely shut the system off?

With more than 1.2 million homes now powered by the sun, more firefighters are coming into contact

with solar installations when responding to emergencies. A new interactive online training course is helping them become solar smarter, so they are confident making swift, safe decisions in an emergency situation where solar technology is present.

Working in partnership with the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), the Interstate Renewable Energy Council (IREC) released the unique online solar training specifically for firefighters in June 2016, with 14 video tutorials and five interactive 3-D simulations. And, throughout 2017, in-person training courses are happening at more than 30 locations across the country, which can be taken on their own or in addition to the online course.

“The free-of-charge online format makes the training very accessible, so more firefighters learn about responding to solar-equipped structures, whether or not they are able to participate in a live training workshop,” says IREC’s Director of Workforce and Credentialing Laure-Jeanne Davignon.

More than 300,000 firefighters nationwide now have access to these new solar training opportunities through IREC’s partnership with the IAFF, and through the support of the U.S. Department of Energy SunShot Initiative. The training can be accessed at the IAFF’s Web site: www.iaff.org/pvsafetytraining.

Derek Alkonis of the Los Angeles County Fire Department, has this to say about the impact of the firefighter training: “PV systems are becoming more prevalent in our communities and firefighters need to understand how to safely work around them. This program provides awareness to the hazards and the operational procedures required to shut down the systems safely . . . and will benefit firefighters around the world.”

From the first in-person training, held during the Fire Rescue East Conference in Daytona Beach, FL, comes very positive feedback.

“This training was great. We can take back what we learned and immediately put those skills to work,” said Jim Reynolds, a member of the City of Bradenton (FL) Fire Department.

The course—designed for firefighters, incident commanders and training officers—uses real scenarios and case studies so participants learn how to IDENTIFY the presence of solar, even if panels are not immediately visible; SHUT DOWN the solar system to the extent possible; WATCH OUT for hazards; and LEAVE the scene as safe as possible. The course is taught by active duty firefighters who present the information in terms relevant to what firefighters experience on the job.

The primary message here is clear: don’t wait for an emergency to learn the answers to important questions about solar technologies. Whether you take the self-paced online course or attend an in-

person training, this course offers you the opportunity to more confidently, safely, and effectively operate around solar-equipped structures.

Here's what course participants are saying . . .

“I like the fact that the course used a variety of methods to present the information. The interactive features made the course more interesting.”

“It is very good that a course is finally available online for first responders.”

“Easy to learn on my own time at my own pace.”

“The instructor explained the material in an easy to understand fashion without getting into too much unnecessary technical information.”

“The material in the course was very clearly explained in "firefighter" terms.”

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