

SAFETY

Seasonal firefighters put through their paces

The 119 seasonal firefighters recruited for 2019/20 have started their four-week wildland firefighting training course and are set to be deployed this month.

The City of Cape Town's latest batch of recruits is being put through their paces at the training ahead of being deployed in teams to various fire stations around the metropole to assist with the combatting of vegetation fires over the warmer months.

Seasonal firefighters were introduced as an Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) in early 2009 to fund the appointment of 40 seasonal firefighters.

The programme has since grown to more than 100 firefighters to increase resources and minimise the risk to lives and property, particularly where vegetation and mountain fires threaten the urban edge.

"Our city has very different firefighting needs to many others, literally because of the lay of the land, and the seasonal firefighter concept has been an enormous help

to overcome that challenge. They perform a vital role alongside our permanent staff to safeguard lives and property, but their presence also means that we have more resources to deal with the other demands on the fire service, like residential fires and special service calls such as motor vehicle accidents. We are immensely grateful to the thousands of candidates who put up their hands every year to try out for the programme," says Mayco member for safety and security, JP Smith.

On average, more than two-thirds of fires dealt with by the City's fire and rescue service each year are categorised as vegetation fires.

Most of these occur over the warmer months from December to April.

The programme is very popular among would-be firefighters, with stiff competition each year for the limited number of placements available.

In 2019 the recruitment drive saw 1 632

candidates try out for the physical fitness assessment. Of these, 796 qualified to move onto the written assessment, followed by 249 being invited for one-on-one interviews.

The current batch of recruits was selected based on test scores and a vetting process including criminal checks and 31 of these candidates are returning seasonal staff.

The training course started on Monday 11 November with induction and orientation, and the issuing of personal protective equipment.

All staff will undergo four weeks of theoretical, practical and physical training during the Basic Wildland Firefighting Course, under the supervision of 16 seasonal supervisors.

The curriculum's theoretical content covers everything from City protocols to fire behaviour and weather conditions, firefighter safety and survival, the tools required for the job and fire suppression methods, among others.

The recruits must complete a theoretical and practical assessment before their training is considered complete and they are deployed.

"This is the final hurdle for our seasonals.

"They've already gone through a lot to get to this point, and I encourage them to remain focused on the training at hand, so that they are able to realise their goal of being on the frontline.

"I also want to extend a special word of thanks to the fire and rescue service staff who devote themselves to this programme each year, not only in the interest of public safety, but also for the development of potential future firefighters," says Smith.



Mayco member for safety and security, JP Smith addresses seasonal firefighters.