



**Publication:** Sunday Tribune - Main

**Title:** SA teams help battle wild fires in Canada

**Publish date:** 18 Jun 2023

**Page:** 2

**Reach:** 18632

**AVE:R** 27834.84

**Author:**  
Lethu.nxumalo

---



The fire fighting teams deployed to Canada, US consist of a considerable number of women. Photo: supplied.

## HEROES

# SA teams help battle wild fires in Canada

LETHU NXUMALO  
lethu.nxumalo@inl.co.za

MORE than 400 South African Working On Fire (WoF) firefighters have been deployed to the province of Alberta in Canada to assist with stopping wildfires which have been ongoing since March and have affected 11 provinces.

The request for urgent assistance came from the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre in terms of an existing memorandum of understanding between Canada and South Africa which provides for the exchange of wildland fire management resources.

The wildfires were believed to have been caused by either lightning or accidental human activity. At least 30 000 have been evacuated from their homes and smoke has caused air quality alerts and evacuations in the US and Europe.

Some of these firefighters were trained under the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPW) in partnership with WoF and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment. This is the fifth deployment of a WoF team to Canada and they will be on duty for 35 days and will spend 28 days on the fire line.

The first group of 200 firefighters and 15 managers left South Africa from the Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport on a chartered aircraft on June 6 and they were followed by a second contingent of 200 firefighters and 14 managers on Thursday. Out of these men and women, 49 are from KZN.

Teams underwent a three-day training at the Kishugu Training Academy in Mbombela, Mpumalanga to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively combat the wildfire conditions in Alberta.

Linton Rensburg, Canadian deployment head and stakeholder relations manager, told the *Sunday Tribune* all firefighters needed to be in possession of a valid Yellow Card which allows them to fight fires in SA. They also had to pass the Canadian and WoF fitness tests, have a minimum of three years' experience and be in possession of a valid passport.

"Canada is experiencing one of their worst fire seasons ever. Our firefighters are trained wildland firefighters and these deployees have been specifically prepared to be familiar with conditions in Canada.

"They have been trained in the use of Canadian water pumps and water tanks, they have also been extensively prepared around the conditions and what to expect. About 100 of our firefighters have been previously deployed to Canada as well."

Rensburg said the country has just under 5000 firefighters stationed at 230 bases. In the current winter fire season there were around 4 000 firefighters who were providing fire prevention and fire suppression services to landowners.

"The feedback we have received is positive from our first group, their spirits are high and they have been deployed to two fires currently about 180km outside Edmonton in the town of Edson."

The first group is expected back in the country by July 10 while the return date for the second group is July 21.

"For these young men and women it's a proud moment for them and their families. It's a vote of confidence in the success of this the most successful Expanded Public Works programme of government and WoF.

"They were previously unemployed youth and today through the training and development in the programme they have been given this huge opportunity to represent their country," said Rensburg.

