

Israeli Firefighters Get Some American Help

by David Lev

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(Israelnationalnews.com) Help has been pouring in from around the world to aid in wake of the tragedy in the Carmel forest, as the fire that has been raging since Thursday continues to eat away at one of the prettiest spots in Israel. Over the weekend, firefighting planes equipped with water and chemicals have been working to prevent the spread of the fire, and over the coming days, firefighters will be entering the thick of the blaze in order to douse the remaining pockets of fire.

Already, Israeli firefighters have been working for four days straight, and there is still a great deal of work to do for the only 500- strong force. With the heavy workload, exhaustion has begun to set in. Relieving them will be several dozen firefighters from the United States – participants in a unique program called the Firefighters for Israel Emergency Volunteers Project. “We have over 80 firefighters whom we’ve trained in Israeli firefighting methods available to come an help when needed,” director of the project Adi Zahavi told Israel National Radio.

The EVP was formed in the wake of the Second Lebanon War, as thousands of missiles fell on northern Israel. Many of the missiles hit urban areas, causing fires, and exhausting the capacity of Israeli firefighters. Several dozen firefighters from Rockland County in New York pooled their talents and came to Israel to help out, and the project led to the EVP, which conducts training programs in the U.S. for firefighters to come and help out in Israel in time of need.

“In the U.S., firefighting crews are made up of 10 to 15 firefighters, and you have backup,” says Zahavi. “In Israel, crews are much smaller and have no backup, so they have to deal with a lot more issues. So, we train American firefighters in the Israeli method of working, and they are able to come and help out when necessary.” The response among firefighters has been very positive, with firefighters from all backgrounds enthusiastically volunteering for the training. “In fact, many of the firefighters we’ve worked with weren’t familiar with Israel before, and now, after the training, many have expressed a desire to visit Israel,” says Zahavi. “So, we’re doing some pro-Israel *hasbara* [public relations, ed.], as well.”

The training takes place in the U.S., with the blessing of fire chiefs in the communities where the EVP runs programs. It’s most recent program took place in Garland, Texas, where several dozen firefighters from around Texas trained under the direction of Israeli fire officials. “On Thursday, we contacted 40 firefighters who said they could be ready to come to Israel within 48 hours. We arrange for the flights, insurance, lodging, etc., but we decided to wait until Sunday to begin bringing them in.” By then, Zahavi is hopeful that much of the work of dousing the blaze will be finished – but by then, the Israeli firefighters will need a break, and the American volunteers will relieve them.

In the wake of the Carmel fire, the EVP is set to expand its operations, and Zahavi says that they are set to begin training another 200 firefighters. “While the program is designed to help out in a long-term emergency, such as a war, our volunteers have told us that they would be glad to help out with the current fire as well. Hopefully we will be able to put the blaze out and not have to take them from their regular jobs for too long”.