

# Firefighters relish hands-on training

Homes in path of SDS pipeline used for several types of drills to sharpen skills.

By TOM PURFIELD  
The Pueblo West View

Firefighters made the bang-up most of a unique training opportunity last weekend in Pueblo West.

Colorado Springs Utilities allowed fire departments from throughout the region to conduct destructive training exercises on homes that are set for demolition on Sequoya Drive and Marengo Drive to make way for the Southern Delivery System pipeline.

"This is incredible because it gives an opportunity to practice your skills that you learned in class and actually perform them on a real building," Pueblo West Assistant Fire Chief Shawn Guthrie said. "We don't have that chance unless we actually have a working fire and that's not time to practice, that's time to go to work. So this is

excellent hands-on work."

The training exercises were conducted during daylight hours on Saturday and Sunday, and after nightfall on Monday.

Crews from Pueblo West, the City of Pueblo, Pueblo Rural, Boone and West Park were some of the firefighters who took advantage of the opportunity to conduct drills that involved smashing through walls, breaking through the roof and clearing a safe path through glass windows.

"We had the opportunity to smoke it up and do building searches looking for live victims," Guthrie said. "We did vertical and horizontal ventilation drills where we released the pressure, we did emergency egress drills where we actually breach walls and make doors where there weren't any, and we're doing forcible entry work."

SDS Resident Engineer Dennis Auge was on site to ensure the fire crews had any support they needed from SDS regarding the structures or any other concerns.

Ryan Orndoff, who is enrolled in the Pueblo Rural Fire Department Academy, received a fire science degree from Casper College. He said the CSU-sponsored training was similar to much of the training he obtained while pursuing that degree.

"You get the hands-on experience. You only learn so much by what you're taught from a book in your academy," Orndoff said. "It's good to renew your knowledge every so often, to get this hands-on experience."

Orndoff said some of the more valuable aspects of the training were the smoke-filled environment that was created and the fact that it was performed in a structure where the layout was a mystery.

"It's just like going to somebody's house that you have no idea how they have their house set up. By walking the perimeter, you can get a good idea of what's inside by the layout of the house, the size of the windows, things like that," Orndoff said. "But it's really good to get

everybody out here just to renew all of our experience.

"It always reminds you of the pertinent things that you need to remember, especially when you have good instructors out here like we did today."

Guthrie said the night training Monday would provide another element, working with lights and "it ups the ante so far as taking responsibility for your personal safety."

No dollar value for the training was readily available, but Guthrie deemed it "priceless." In 14 years with PWFD, he never before had this type of opportunity in a training scenario.

Taking the avenue from the classroom into the field, without live fire and lives at stake, was possibly the most valuable aspect of the drills.

"It makes the training come full-circle. In a classroom, all you're doing is getting somebody else's description of it," Guthrie said. "This way, you realize the mechanics of it and you just put that tool in your toolbox."



View photo/Tom Purfield

A firefighter smashes a window Sunday as part of training on a Sequoya Drive home set for demolition.

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