



For Immediate Release

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### **VDOF Training Prepares Employees to Respond to Disaster at Home and Beyond**

The Eastern Region of the Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) will hold a “tractor-plow” training day for agency staff on Tuesday, September 28, 2021 at the New Kent Forestry Center, 11301 Pocahontas Trail, Providence Forge, VA 23140. VDOF tractor-plow units are bulldozers with fire-plows attached to the back that build firelines. This training will focus on basic elements of tractor-plow operations, to include learning to care for transport trucks and tractor-plows, driving the transport, unloading and loading the bulldozer, plowing and blading firelines, driving bulldozers through an obstacle course, and using a winch.

Basic and Advanced Tractor-Plow Operation training is a key element of the 5-year Wildland Firefighter Training Matrix for new field staff. The Training Matrix is composed of 22 courses for a total of 420 hours. Combining this formal training with wildfire response and prescribed burning activities allows for all 130 VDOF field staff to become highly specialized emergency responders. The agency’s field staff are composed of senior area foresters, area foresters, forest technicians, water quality specialists and Engineers, and community foresters who perform many other duties to help Virginians protect and develop healthy, sustainable forest resources. Where wildfire is concerned, dozens of VDOF employees travel to other states each year to assist with busy wildfire seasons or hurricane response efforts.

On average, there are more than 1,200 wildfires per year reported to VDOF; of those, nearly 95% involve local fire department response. Tractor-plows are a piece of firefighting apparatus unique to VDOF and are requested when the fire is too large to contain with fire engines and hand crews. VDOF has 88 bulldozers ready to travel 24/7 throughout the state. Thanks to funding approved by the General Assembly in 2016, VDOF has been able to replace 25+ year-old bulldozers and transports with 24 newer units. VDOF also makes a concerted effort to recruit and train “part-timers” who are interested in becoming tractor-plow operators to expand the agency’s response capacity.

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The Virginia Department of Forestry protects and develops healthy, sustainable forest resources for Virginians. With nearly 16 million acres of forestland and more than 108,000 Virginians employed in forestry, forest products and related industries, Virginia forests provide an overall economic output of more than \$21 Billion annually.

Headquartered in Charlottesville, the Agency has forestry staff members assigned to every county to provide citizen service and public safety protection across the Commonwealth, which it's been doing now for more than 100 years. VDOF is an equal opportunity provider.