

Mobile Sleeping Units, providing the answer to daytime sleeping, welcomed by tired firefighters

California Interagency Incident Management Team 5, always interested in any innovation that will help us do our jobs better, pioneered the first wildland fire use of Mobile Sleeping Units (MSU's) on the McNally and the Williams Fire during the 2002 Fire Season. From the outside, the Mobile Sleeping Unit looks like any semi-trailer traveling the Interstate. Inside, however, there are cubicles that can sleep 1 person for a total 42 people per trailer. The trailer is fully air-conditioned and insulated against outside noise. Acoustic walls, floors and ceilings provide a quiet interior "sound lab" environment for tired crews. Team 5's objective was to provide comfortable and quiet sleeping facilities for the night shift crews who need to sleep soundly during the day.

Normally, large tents are used for this purpose, and privacy is scarce...everyone sleeps dormitory style, on cots or on the ground in sleeping bags. The only air circulation is a noisy swamp cooler. The tents are set up at the Incident Base and are subject to the typical daytime noise of a busy fire camp. The doors and window flaps are closed, but dust filtering in is always a concern. The Mobile Sleeping Units resolve all these problems.

When compared to the rates of the large "swamp cooled" tents the added expense for the MSU's becomes justified, especially when daytime temperatures elevate to levels that preclude quality sleep. Rates for the "swamped cooled" tents are around \$600 per day and the rate for the MSU's are \$1900 per day (24 hour period). Carefully monitoring their use and releasing the units as the needs diminish can control costs.

What did the crews say that used them? Their comments were overwhelmingly positive. In very isolated cases some individual crewmembers felt claustrophobic and chose to sleep elsewhere, but an overwhelming majority loved them. Team 5's goal was to make sure our crews were properly rested, as they will be safer and more alert "on the line."

This test has been successful. We expect to see these units used more frequently in the future.