

Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation

PRESS RELEASE



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UTFD Fire Chief Named to Governor's Fire Service Policy Council

MISSION – Giving a voice to Oregon-based tribal fire agencies, Umatilla Tribal Fire Department (UTFD) Chief James Hall was recently appointed to the Governor's Fire Service Policy Council.

"I was honored to receive an official appointment by the Governor's Office to serve as the Tribal Fire Response Agency representative," said Hall, who is the council's first Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) representative and first representative for the nine tribes in Oregon. "I believe it is extremely important that tribal communities have a voice in statewide fire service discussions, especially as Oregon continues to face increasingly complex emergency response challenges involving wildfire, hazardous materials transportation, EMS system demands and interagency coordination."

Established in 1989, the council provides guidance to the governor and state fire marshal on issues affecting fire protection and life safety. It also serves as a statewide forum in which fire service leaders and public safety stakeholders can discuss issues impacting communities and develop policy recommendations and implementation strategies. The tribal representative position was added during Oregon's 2025 legislative session to ensure tribal fire agencies have a voice in fire service policy discussions and emergency response planning.

Along with the tribal representative, the council includes representatives from the Oregon Volunteer Firefighters Association, Oregon Fire Chiefs Association, Oregon Fire District Directors Association, Oregon Fire Marshals Association, Oregon State Fire Marshal's Office, Oregon State Fire Fighters Council and other state agencies.

"The importance of the council has grown significantly as Oregon faces larger wildfire seasons, recruitment and retention challenges and greater needs for interagency preparedness planning," Hall said. "Having this diverse representation is important because it brings together perspectives from emergency

response, fire prevention, firefighter training, EMS, local government, tribal governments and statewide public safety leadership.”

Hall said the council meets quarterly, and that his first meeting was in April. The next meeting is scheduled for July. In addition to formal meetings, members participate in discussions, workgroups, outreach efforts, policy development and coordination activities related to fire service preparedness, emergency response planning, firefighter training and interagency collaboration.

“I hope to strengthen communication and collaboration between tribal, local, state and federal fire agencies throughout Oregon. I also want to ensure that the unique needs and challenges facing tribal fire departments are recognized in statewide policy discussions,” he said.

Hall added that his goals of representing tribal fire response agencies directly align with the council’s because many issues affecting tribal departments are also statewide concerns. The representation is also for tribes that do not have official structural/EMS departments but instead just wildland capabilities or are working on establishing or expanding capabilities.

“Tribal fire departments often operate in rural or geographically complex areas while coordinating with multiple jurisdictions and agencies. Challenges involving wildfire response, EMS staffing shortages, access to training, communications interoperability, hazardous materials preparedness and firefighter safety affect nearly every fire agency in Oregon,” he said. “By bringing tribal perspectives and operational experience into these discussions, I believe we can improve statewide coordination, preparedness and public safety outcomes for all communities.”

Hall said as someone who began in the fire service approximately 35 years ago as a volunteer firefighter with the UTFD, he considers it an honor to serve on the council.

“I take great pride in representing both the CTUIR and the nine tribes in the state of Oregon. I believe this appointment reflects the growing recognition of the important role tribal emergency services play in protecting communities, supporting mutual aid systems and participating in statewide emergency response efforts,” he said.

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation is comprised of the Cayuse, Walla Walla and Umatilla Tribes, and formed under the Treaty of 1855 at the Walla Walla Valley, 12 Stat. 945. In 1949, the Tribes adopted a constitutional form of government to protect, preserve and enhance the reserved treaty rights guaranteed under federal law.

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Caption: James Hall