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# CAL FIRE NEWS RELEASE

## California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection



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### **Governor Presents Medal of Valor to Seven Firefighters** Awards are California's Highest Public Servant Honor

**Sacramento** – Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger today awarded the Governor's Medal of Valor to seven CAL FIRE employees who demonstrated extraordinary bravery and heroism in saving a life. The firefighters received the Medal of Valor, the highest honor that California bestows upon its public servants, as part of a ceremony recognizing 42 state employees.

“Everyday our firefighters come to work knowing that today they may be asked to risk their life to save another,” said Chief Ruben Girjalva, director of CAL FIRE. “Today we honor those, who with incredible bravery risked it all.”

#### **John Guhl of Sacramento**

On May 18, 2008, CAL FIRE Deputy State Fire Marshal John Guhl stopped a disoriented male driver from injuring himself and others with his vehicle. Fire Marshal Guhl observed a vehicle erratically driving next to a fifteen foot rock-faced cliff embankment. The driver repeatedly reversed and drove his vehicle closer to the cliff, while hitting nearby trees and concrete barriers. Fire Marshal Guhl approached the vehicle, identified himself and asked the man to turn off the car. When the driver tried to back up again, Fire Marshal Guhl opened the unlocked passenger door, jumped inside, lunged for the car's ignition key and turned the engine off.

#### **Wesley D. Grim of Visalia**

On May 31, 2007, CAL FIRE Captain Wesley Grim responded to a fire at a single family home in the community of Exeter. Upon arrival, he found the home fully engulfed with heavy smoke and flames coming out of the windows. Captain Grim was told that an infant was trapped in the back bedroom and several attempts to rescue the infant had failed due to the intense heat and smoke. Captain Grim decided to make one last attempt and entered through the bedroom window, searched through the smoke filled room and found the infant in a bed in the far corner. Re-tracing his way back to the window, Captain Grim handed the infant to an Exeter Police Officer who immediately transferred the infant to the hospital.

#### **Carl Schwettmann, Jr. of El Cajon**

On October 21, 2007, CAL FIRE Captain Carl Schwettmann, Jr. was assisting with medical treatment of a CAL FIRE engine crew that had suffered severe burns from the Harris Fire near the town of Potrero, when he was informed that a firefighter was missing and presumed to be

dead. Captain Schwettmann drove through intense heat and smoke to find this missing firefighter. After a quick search of the area, Captain Schwettmann found the missing firefighter, who had suffered 2nd degree burns over his entire body. He called for a helicopter to rescue and transport the severely injured firefighter to the hospital. Thanks to Captain Schwettmann's heroic act, the firefighter made a full recovery and was able to return to duty.

### **Eric R. Ayers of Susanville**

On December 28, 2007, CAL FIRE Captain Eric Ayers was conducting routine business in Susanville when he heard an emergency dispatch that a passenger vehicle had lost control due to ice, traveled down a 30 foot embankment and landed on four feet of water in the Susan River. Captain Ayers arrived at scene and slid down the snow covered embankment, entered the icy water and swam to the vehicle, where he found a woman suspended upside down by her seatbelt with her head under water. Captain Ayers used his knife to cut the seatbelt loose, freed her from the vehicle, and assisted her back to the riverbank. Both were treated for mild hypothermia and released with no further injuries or complications.

### **James F. Allen and Franklin T. Johnson of Mariposa**

On February 2, 2008, Fire Apparatus Engineer James Allen and Firefighter Franklin Johnson were dispatched to a residential structure fire in the community of Delhi. Upon arriving at the scene, they saw the fire was well established, involving 75 percent of the home and venting through the roof. After hearing reports that a child was inside the home, Allen and Johnson entered the home in search of the child. With flames all around them, the two were able to use their hose to knock down the flames and access the bedroom, where they found a 12-year old boy laying face down. Together they picked the boy up and safely got him outside, where he was transported to the hospital. Engineer Allen and Firefighter Johnson's actions during this rescue were responsible for saving the life of this young boy.

### **Corey Call of St. Helena**

On May 13, 2008, Forestry Equipment Manager Corey Call was driving on Highway 101 near the city of Cloverdale, when he noticed a vehicle drifting into the opposite bound traffic lane. Call immediately made a U-turn and found the vehicle had crossed over the center divide and crashed into a group of trees. Call crawled through a broken window into the smoke-filled car and attempted to pull the semi-conscious driver out of the car. Unfortunately, the limited space and damage to the car made it difficult to pull the woman out. Call attempted several more times, but the smoke and heat kept him from succeeding.

The Medal of Valor, which started in 1959, is the highest honor that California bestows on its public servants and is awarded to California state employees who have performed an extraordinary act of heroism above and beyond the normal call of duty, at great risk to their own personal safety or life, to save the life of another. Award nominations are made by the employee's department.

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Editors Note: Photos of the ceremony are available by contacting Daniel Berlant at [Daniel.Berlant@fire.ca.gov](mailto:Daniel.Berlant@fire.ca.gov)