

By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

In addition to a number of calls in their own district the past week, members of the Imperial Volunteer Fire Department (IVFD) spent a lot of man hours in mutual aid calls to the Ogallala area, as well.

Fire Chief Nick Schultz said IVFD firefighters responded to mutual aid calls to a series of fires that started around Lake McConaughy and Keith County last Thursday, and also sent members of its dive team to a drowning recovery effort at the lake over the weekend.

After the Friday night disappearance of a 36-year-old Colorado man, Imperial's dive team was called in to cooperate in the search at Lake McConaughy.

According to the Game & Parks Commission, witnesses last saw the man Friday paddling a raft when he capsized and disappeared. After searching all day Saturday, efforts were called off at dark. The search began again Sunday, when he was recovered about 9:45 a.m.

Fire Chief Schultz said five IVFD firefighters who are on the department's dive team spent about 15 hours on the scene Saturday when fellow firefighter Kelsey Weiss was the day's incident commander (IC). Keystone-Lemoyne would have been the department in charge but they were out fighting fires.

Weiss returned on Sunday to assist the IC from Keystone-Lemoyne, and spent another four hours there.

His wife, Kymberli, who is EMT trained, also helped with shore assistance on Saturday, Schultz noted.

The Lake McConaughy drowning was the fifth in Nebraska this year.

A series of fires in Keith County was ignited by lightning last Thursday, and IVFD was one of the 25 departments responding with mutual aid assistance.

Schultz said IVFD sent a tanker and grass-fighting rig and six firefighters Thursday night, and another relief crew of five men left at 4 a.m. Friday to assist at seven different fires burning around the lake and other sites in Keith County.

The first six IVFD members were on the scene for 12 hours, and the relief crew of five spent another 13 hours there.

All of the fires are now contained but they burned upwards of 50,000 acres. Some of them are still burning in the inaccessible canyon areas, but are under control.

Also assisting at the Keith County fires were members of the Lamar and Wauneta volunteer fire departments.

The IVFD also responded to Saturday's plane crash that took the life of 54-year-old Scot German of Imperial.

The week, Chief Schultz said a request was made to bring in a three-member Critical Stress Management Team, provided by the Nebraska Volunteer Firefighters Association.

Ten IVFD members attended Tuesday night's session at the fire hall.