

ABOUT MICHAEL ARCHER



Michael Archer is a wildfire consultant and writer. He has written articles for *Home and Fire Magazine*, *Wildland Firefighter Magazine*, and other publications, lectured to many groups about fire issues, been quoted by Associated Press and USA Today reporters, and also appeared on cable and network TV discussing wildfire issues. Currently, he is acting as webmaster and technical consultant to Wildfire Research Network ([www.wildfireresearch.org](http://www.wildfireresearch.org)), a Los Angeles-based citizens' action group that promotes firefighting issues involving the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI).

His "Firebombers Incorporated" series of novels gives readers an intriguing "what-if" scenario on how 21st century technology could modernize the wildland firefighting force. His novel "Firestorm," received excellent reviews from *Writers Digest*, *The Nashville News*, *The VVA Veteran* (Vietnam Veterans of America's magazine) and firefighting professionals across the [United States](http://www.firebomberpublications.com). His company, Firebomber Publications, donates 50 percent of net profits to organizations that support the families of injured and fallen firefighters.



You can visit his website at: [www.firebomberpublications.com](http://www.firebomberpublications.com)

Firestorm can be purchased at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com)

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# Getting Into the San Diego Fire Academy

Michael Archer | April 25, 2008

San Diego Fire-Rescue (SDFR) is one of the largest fire services in the nation. Not only does this force boast 46 fire stations responsible for more than 330 square miles of territory, it also has several integral units including traditional engine companies and paramedics. SDFR has strike teams experienced in fighting wildfires, wilderness rescue, as well as the aerial component of firefighting helicopters. In order to provide only the best personnel to staff this organization, the department operates a Fire Academy, which prepares recruits for a rewarding career in the fire service. So what does it take to get into this diversified fire department?

## Basic Qualifications

There are several requirements for applicants to the Fire Academy, which include:

- Possession of a current valid Emergency Medical Technician Certificate issued by the State of California or by a EMT certifying agency approved by the State of California (80 percent to 90 percent of emergencies are medical)
- County of San Diego EMT System ID Card
- Certificate for Basic Life Support for the Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation and Emergency Cardiac Provider
- A valid California Class C Driver's License

Once a candidate has these prerequisites, they can apply to the academy.

## Entry Exams

The next step is to take the academy entrance exam. This is a two part exam, as explained by Training Division Battalion Chief Steve Ricci. "It's a 14 week academy," said Chief Ricci. "People are selected to the academy by taking a written Civil Service exam. After the written exam, depending on their score, they get to the oral interview."

"This is a State Fire Marshall Academy run through Miramar College," Chief Ricci continued. "Thirty-six people are selected (per class), of which five from Miramar College are selected by lottery through open enrollment." Needless to say, this gives an edge to anyone who attends Miramar College.

But academics form only part of the requirements. As firefighters, personnel have to meet rigorous physical standards. "The City of San Diego has its own Physical Abilities Test (PAT)," said Chief Ricci. "A highly qualified CPAT (Candidate Physical Abilities Test) is also accepted."



### Be Prepared

Needless to say, not everyone who enters the academy will graduate. "We've seen 70 academies now, and we find that people who fail the academy lack two things — not being mentally prepared for the grind of the academy and not being physically able to keep up," Chief Ricci stated. "You need to be in the best shape of your life when you apply to the academy, so keep in shape after getting out of the military. We lose three to 10 academy members in each class, usually towards the end ... when they are physically beat up. They need to stay the course."

### Advice to Veterans

So what gives veterans the edge to getting into the academy? "You have to make yourself competitive with other people out there," said Chief Ricci. "We have a lot of people coming in today with four-year degrees. People with four-year degrees, EMT certification, sometimes paramedic certification, Firefighter 1 certification — these will be much more competitive today. Medics from the military are going to have an easier time simply because they already have a strong medical background."

The training veterans received is also highly prized by the department. "Military folks have been regimented, are used to following orders, more mature, understand the chain of command, and will have an extensive leg up on getting into the academy."

The leadership skills veterans possess also help. "Within the 36-member academy, the academy captain will be chosen by the other students," Chief Ricci pointed out. "For instance, I recall that the 69th academy captain was from a military background. Military folks tend to be our natural leaders."

### The Payoff

Although the path may seem difficult, the rewards of working for San Diego Fire-Rescue are worth it. "We work 56-hour workweeks, which is nine to 10 shifts a month in 24 hour shifts," Chief Ricci explained. Since firefighters work 24-hour shifts, this reduces the number of days a firefighter actually has to work. As a result, firefighters have a lot of free time for personal pursuits (or overtime, if they're so inclined). The pay scale isn't bad either, with firefighters earning up to \$60,000, fire captains earning more than \$80,000, and fire chief salaries bumping up around \$100,000. Add in the medical and retirement benefits, and you have an outstanding opportunity here.

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