

NWT Defensive Firefighter Training Program

Frequently Asked Questions

What is this program?

The NWT Defensive Firefighter Training (NWT-DFT) program is designed to provide firefighters in the Northwest Territories with foundational skills in defensive firefighting operations. It is currently open to fire chiefs in communities who provide a defensive fire service, either as volunteers or in a paid capacity. The NWT-DFT program uses the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards and covers the basic safety and operational practices of defensive firefighting.

Who should take this program?

NWT-DFT is foundational knowledge for any practicing defensive firefighter in the NWT. Once completed, firefighters in NWT communities can work at a defensive level of firefighting only. This is not a one and done approach, firefighters must maintain their skills by regularly attending training sessions in their community.

What is defensive firefighting?

Defensive firefighting involves a strategy where firefighters do not enter the burning structure. Instead, they work from the outside to contain the fire, prevent it from spreading, and protect surrounding buildings and areas. Defensive firefighters use hoses and other equipment to fight the fire from a distance. This approach prioritizes firefighter safety.

If defensive firefighting is safe, why is this training required?

All firefighting operations have risks. It would be irresponsible to place anyone in a risky occupational situation without proper training. Territorial legislation under the mandate of the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission (WSCC) requires that individuals are appropriately trained to do the job. Training is one critical piece to ensure firefighters are aware of the safety best practices in their occupation.

Why was this program developed? Why can't training be provided in other ways?

In most places in Canada the entry-level training for firefighters is NFPA 1001. NFPA 1001 assumes that firefighters work in larger fire departments with greater resources than what most NWT communities have. These are a few reasons why the territorial government has adapted content from the NFPA 1001 course to suit NWT community fire departments.

Fire Chiefs can always choose other options for fire training, the NWT does not require them to participate in this program. However, for a fire department to meet WSCC standards, firefighters must be trained appropriately. This program is one pathway to meeting that requirement.

How do I access the training?

NWT-DFT is an in-person training program. When ready, the training may be provided as part of the fire department's in-house training or can be run as a 4 or 5 day course; the intent is for flexible delivery options to suit your needs. A curriculum and toolkit will be accessible on MACA Learn for instructors to conduct the 11 training sessions. To receive training, you must be a volunteer firefighter in your community.

How long is the training?

Currently there is no set time limit, however the skills learned will diminish over time if not continuously practiced. Depending on the fire chief and availability of volunteers, the program could be delivered over five full days, over several months, or somewhere in between. Again, options for communities and their fire department to choose the approach that works for them. Fire chiefs may choose to run training sessions weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly in their community or invite another instructor to deliver the training.

Although the evaluation process to become certified is in development, after the 11 sessions are complete, each participant may be eligible for evaluation on the 36 core defensive skills and knowledge needed to work as a defensive firefighter in the NWT. The approved evaluation process and requirements will be communicated once finalized through consultation with the NWT fire chiefs.

How will NWT-DFT be taught?

Fire chiefs will be trained on both the NWT-DFT content and will also receive training on how to effectively train members of their department. This provides communities the flexibility in how and when they deliver the training to their members.

When will this be ready?

NWT-DFT is currently in development. The complete 11 sessions will be piloted this fall with NWT defensive Fire Chiefs and is expected to have the evaluation process accessible starting spring of 2025.

What if my community does not have an active fire department?

You can contact the assistant fire marshal in your MACA regional office for information and support in establishing a local fire department at the grassroots level.

Why isn't there training offered to everyone in the NWT even if some communities do not have a local fire department?

NWT-DFT requires a certain amount of fire equipment and personnel in each community. The training uses these resources so participants can acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to pass the NWT-DFT assessments. Proper training is crucial because incomplete training can lead people to take unacceptable risks, thinking they are adequately prepared. Therefore, NWT-DFT requires functional defensive-level fire departments with the necessary equipment, participant attendance, and a certified fire chief to offer proper training.