Fire Boss Charged With Manslaughter



A former fire crew boss has been charged with manslaughter and lying to investigators five years after four forestry firefighters perished in a wildfire in Washington State. Ellreese N. Daniels faces four counts of involuntary manslaughter and seven counts of making false statements to people who were investigating the fatal fire.

The victims – Tom Craven, 30, Devin Weaver, 21, Jessica Johnson, 19, and Karen Fitzpatrick, 18, all of Washington State – had been taking refuge in aluminum fire shelters when the fire roared over them. A fifth firefighter survived with serious burns, while several other firefighters and two campers were able to get out of the area.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Tom Hopkins says Daniels showed gross negligence by failing to order the firefighters out of the area when the flames advanced. He is also accused of not being truthful with investigators. The alleged false statements pertained to whether Daniels talked to fire crews when they arrived at the scene, whether he ordered them out of the area and whether he directed a US Forest Service employee to take two civilians into her emergency shelter.

A Forest Service investigation concluded that numerous danger signs were ignored and that the fire was underestimated. It also alleged that the only escape route was cut off. Several employees either quit, retired or were reassigned from active duty following the fire.

The Thirtymile Fire resulted in the imposition of minimum training requirements and experience and greater involvement with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regarding safety and training policies.