

California Prison Industry Authority
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Female Inmate Carpenters Graduate from Apprenticeship Training and Dedicate Classroom They Built for Female Inmate Firefighters

Rehabilitation Program Reduces Repeat Crime and Saves Tax Dollars

CHINO....The California Prison Industry Authority (CalPIA) today graduated its second class of female inmates who have learned all the construction skills they need to become apprentice carpenters when they are released on parole. The award winning program is the first of its type for female inmates in the country.

The 14 graduating inmates from the California Institution for Women in Chino celebrated the day by dedicating a new classroom that they and their classmates built that will be used by female inmate firefighters who train at the prison.

“These inmates have already shown the willingness to turn their lives around and this program gives them the real-world skills they need to enter a well-paying professional career when they are released on parole,” explained Charles Pattillo, general manager of the California Prison Industry Authority. “This program gives ex-offenders alternatives that reduce their chances of returning to prison, which creates a better life for them and saves taxpayers millions of dollars as well.”

Through formal agreements with CalPIA, inmates are placed in construction jobs with the Northern California Carpenters Local Union. Inmates that are paroled to Los Angeles County are placed in jobs through the City of Los Angeles Community Development Department through the Office of Mayor Villarigosa.

To help the graduates get a head start on their new careers, the California Prison Industry Authority provides each one with a new tool belt on the day they are paroled, ensuring they are ready to go to work on day one. In addition, the CalPIA pays their union dues for one year.

The pre-apprenticeship course, taught by journeymen union carpenters, includes eight segments ranging from health and safety regulations to basic tool handling before moving on to more technical subjects. Inmates are taught basic math skills and geometry, as well as the ability to read blueprints. Graduating inmates also are required to obtain a GED, which they earn by taking classes after their work day on the job site.

In addition to hands-on carpentry skills, the eight-month class teaches other personal skills to help them succeed in the workplace, such as the importance of showing up on time, taking direction and other “soft skills” that many have never had the opportunity to learn prior to being incarcerated.

Over the last year, the inmates in the pre-apprentice program demolished three old buildings that previously were used as classrooms by female firefighter crews who train at the prison and replaced them with a brand new, 5,600 sq. ft building. The inmates did all of the related work, from digging the foundation and laying concrete to painting and fine carpentry finish work.

Approximately 250 female inmate firefighters train at the California Institution for Women before they are assigned to fire camps in Malibu (Los Angeles County) or in Fallbrook (San Diego County). Crews from these camps were on all of the major fire lines throughout Southern California during the extensive firestorms that hit the region last fall.

The California Prison Industry, dedicated to inmate rehabilitation, is financially self supporting through the sale of its products, ranging from clothing and furniture to agricultural products, which are manufactured at 22 locations within the prison system. Recent data shows that inmates who participate in CalPIA programs and business enterprises have at least a 24 percent better chance of not returning to prison than the general prison population, saving taxpayers an estimated \$11-\$15 million per year.

In addition, teaching inmates job skills in CalPIA businesses where they also can earn money reduces taxpayer funds spent on in-prison vocational education, saving an additional \$30 million per year.

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