

## ***2015 Higgins & Langley Memorial Awards in Swiftwater Rescue Announced***

*For Immediate Release*

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ASHEVILLE, NC, August 24, 2015—The Higgins & Langley Memorial and Education Fund is proud to announce the 2015 Higgins & Langley Memorial Awards, which honor outstanding achievement in the technical rescue discipline of swiftwater and flood rescue.

Although there is always an element of heroism involved in dangerous technical rescue operations, these are not awards for heroism, but rather awards that recognize preparedness, teamwork, and a job well done – sometimes under extreme conditions – where training is vital to the success of rescue missions, as well as the safety of rescue personnel.

Awards are presented to swiftwater and flood rescue experts worldwide in several significant categories, including the Outstanding Achievement Award, Program Development Award, Special Commendation Award, Swiftwater Rescue Incident Award, and the rarely bestowed Lifetime Achievement Award.

The awards will be presented on Friday, October 2, 2015, 7:00 PM, at the annual International Association of Water Rescue Professionals conference in South Bend, IN. Conference site: Century Center, South Bend, Indiana.

### ***2015 Higgins & Langley Awards***

#### ***Swiftwater Rescue Incident Awards***

##### **Croatian Mountain Rescue Service**

Zagreb, Croatia

This award honors the Croatian Mountain Rescue Service's exemplary response during the heaviest rainfall event in 120 years, May 13-18, 2014. Years of training and practice by this team allowed them to safely rescue numerous people throughout the flooded region.

##### ***STAR Flight 2 Crew:***

Travis County, TX

This award honors *STAR Flight's* April 27, 2015 rescue of two victims from a dangerous low-head dam near Lake Mexia where their boat was entrapped. Only through training, practice and experience could this team have succeeded in pulling these victims from the river. Receiving this award: Criag Hilzendager, Stephen Maier, and Howard Polden.

##### **Texas Task Force 1 – HSART:**

San Marcos, TX

This award honors the May 24, 2015 rescue of an elderly man discovered half-submerged, entrapped, unconscious and unresponsive during a separate mission to rescue people from the rooftops of flooded homes in San Marcos, Texas. If not for the swift actions of this Helicopter Search and Rescue (HSART)

crew, the man would likely not have survived. Receiving this award: Lee Barker, Daniel Walker, and Texas Military Forces – Alamo 07.

**Texas Task Force 1 – HSART:**

Sanger, TX

On May 10, 2015, near Sanger, TX, two male victims were trapped in a low water crossing. HSART members Lee Barker and Wayne Twiner responded as members of Texas Task Force 1, along with Texas Military Forces in Alamo 11, to rescue the victims. During the rescue, Rescue Swimmer Twiner experienced trouble when he was swept downstream and submerged underwater. The team soon overcame all obstacles and rescued all victims. Receiving this award: Lee Barker, Wayne Twiner, Ken Larsen, and Texas Military Forces – Alamo 11.

**Texas Task Force 1 – HSART:**

San Marcos, TX

On May 24 in San Marcos, Casey Ping (TX-TF1 HSART Manager) was a single rescuer aboard a hoist-equipped TXARNG LUH72 Lakota (call sign Guard 66). Guard 66 was dispatched to San Marcos in response to reports of multiple people on the rooftops of structures inundated by water, due to major flooding of the Blanco and San Marcos Rivers. Guard 66 came across a man with a young boy. Casey was hoisted down where he discovered that the boy was in shock and hypothermia. Casey and the child were quickly hoisted up and the boy was flown to Central Texas Medical Center for treatment. While at the Emergency Room, the boy was reunited with his mother and sister, who were there for treatment themselves. The family had been separated during the flooding. Without the quick actions of Casey Ping and Guard 66, this young boy might not have survived. Receiving this award: Casey Ping and Guard 66.

***Program Development Award***

**Respect Our River—Saved by the Jacket**

Casper, WY

After an 11 year old boy drowned in a whitewater kayak park in Casper, WY, a strong citizens group created a safety committee to prevent this kind of tragedy from happening again. As a result of their hard work, all law enforcement officers now have throw ropes and water rescue training, and firefighters have been trained in swiftwater rescue. In addition there are public safety announcements on radio, free lifejacket loaner stations, basic swiftwater training for 8<sup>th</sup> graders in schools, and throw rings and throw rope stations along the river.

***Outstanding Achievement Award***

**State of Texas**

Public Safety Agencies

Austin, TX

Office of the Governor, State of Texas

Texas A&M University

Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service

Texas Task Force 1 – Swiftwater Rescue Teams  
Texas Task Force 1 HSART – Helicopter Search and Rescue Teams  
Texas Military Forces  
Texas Army National Guard  
Texas Department of Public Safety  
Texas Division of Emergency Management

This award honors the extraordinary efforts by Texas state emergency response personnel during a massive flood emergency in May 2015, where the National Weather Service in Ft. Worth estimated that 37-trillion gallons of rainwater fell on North and Central Texas, much of it in a matter of hours. Only through their dedication to training, preparedness and practice could a community of rescuers perform safely and save as many lives as they did during this trying time. Among the many lifesaving missions, Texas Task Force 1 HSART performed 42 joint-operation rescues with civilian Texas Task Force 1 Swiftwater Rescue swimmers serving alongside military air crews on Texas National Guard UH 60 Blackhawks and LUH72 Lakota Helicopters. Although there were at least 23 confirmed flood-related fatalities, with several people missing, or unaccounted for, scores of lives were saved by swiftwater rescue teams.

### ***Lifetime Achievement Award***

Casey Ping  
Program Director  
Travis County ***STAR Flight***  
Texas TF1 – Water and Helicopter Rescue Director  
Austin, TX

Casey Ping has been a true pioneer in the technical rescue discipline of swiftwater and flood rescue since the early 1990s. Under Casey's leadership, Travis County ***STAR Flight*** has become one of the premier helicopter based swiftwater rescue teams in the United States. And Casey has dedicated countless hours, serving as a subject matter expert on local, state, and national committees striving to improve flood and hurricane disaster preparedness, and to develop state-of-the-art swiftwater and flood rescue training protocols and mission-specific equipment. Swiftwater rescue operations are among the most dangerous missions for rescue personnel and victims alike, due to the power of moving water and the difficulty of rescuing victims who may be free-floating, stuck in a tree, or on top of a vehicle being swept downstream. As a swiftwater rescue team member, Casey has performed countless rescues of victims who owe him and his teammates their very lives.

### ***Background***

The Higgins & Langley Memorial Awards were established in 1993 by the National Association for Search and Rescue Swiftwater Rescue Committee in honor of Earl Higgins, a writer and filmmaker, who lost his life in 1980 while rescuing a child who was swept down the flood-swollen Los Angeles River, and Los Angeles County Firefighter Paramedic Jeffrey Langley, a pioneer in swiftwater rescue, who lost his life in a helicopter incident in 1993.

Over the past 22-years, the Higgins & Langley Awards have increased awareness about the need for specialized swiftwater and flood rescue training and preparedness. Today, high standards and examples of excellence in swiftwater and flood rescue have inspired public safety agencies worldwide to develop and sustain viable water rescue programs to protect the public and rescuers alike.

The Higgins & Langley Memorial Awards are sponsored by Angel-Guard Rescue Curtain, Los Angeles County Fire Department, CFS Press, Esprit Whitewater, Fire and Rescue Concepts, LLC, K38 Water Safety, Liquid Militia, Kokatat, Mustang Survival, Rescue 3 International/Rescue Source, Rescue Canada-

Force 6 Safety Products, Inc., Sierra Rescue/Rescue 3 West, and the Whitewater Rescue Institute, with additional support provided by the Rudi Schulte Family Foundation, the families of Charley Alison Gee, Adam Bischoff, and John B. and Shirley A. Rigg, as well as contributions from many generous individuals.

Special thanks to the International Association of Water Rescue Professionals, Norman Perry Trophies, South Bend, IN, and Direct Image, Solvang, CA.

Higgins & Langley Memorial and Education Fund: <http://www.higginsandlangley.org/index.php>  
International Association of Water Rescue Professionals: <http://iawrp.com>