

# Old Record offices burned for training

By **JERRY LANKFORD**  
Record Editor



**'Rookie' North Wilkesboro firefighters Robert Stevens, Matthew Cranfill and Chris Richardson trained in the use of breathing gear on Monday evening.**

The ruined two-story structure that once housed the offices of *The Record* and Thursday Printing have been razed.

Members of the North Wilkesboro Fire Department finished burning down the structure, heavily damaged by fire last March.

Completion of the destruction of the building was used as training for firefighters.

Prior to the exercises, North Wilkesboro Fire Chief Niki Hamby said, "Mostly it will make for some good training for some of our rookie firemen. It will give them some experience in a live burn situation and allow them to wear all their gear."

The front, main floor offices of the building were the least damaged by the March 2004 blaze, which is believed to have started in the print shop. The fire was ruled accidental following an investigation by the North Wilkesboro Fire Department and the State Bureau of Investigation.



**Cranfill and Richardson carry out a simulation of a body.**

A lot of this week's firefighters' training focused on self contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) use. The air-fed masks allow firefighters to breath inside burning, heavily smoking structures.

On Monday evening, Hamby firefighters lit fire to straw on the main floor to create smoke so that firemen could experience using the SCBA.

Firefighters continued their training on Tuesday evening, then, at last, the building went up in all engulfing flames.

Such training has many benefits for firefighters.

"We have three brand new rookies and they have been to fires, but as far as training, the only fires we've had have been the NAPA fire and Adams Seafood Fire," Hamby said. "I'm not going to stick someone new in fires like those without some experience. It gives them an opportunity to go into a live burn," Hamby said. "A lot of our training these days is under controlled conditions. Those training situations are great, but it still isn't the same. With this type of training it's more of a real effect. You have different things in a house that gives off different types of smoke, the rooms are different sizes and there are more areas that you should be forewarned about. This gives them a little more to think about."

The training also tests stamina.

"It tells them about how good a shape they are in," Hamby said. "Once you put on 70 pounds of equipment and you're in it for 15 or 20 minutes it drains you pretty good."

Hamby added that it's becoming rare to get a real structure to practice on.

"Years ago we'd have four or five opportunities a year to do this," he said. "Houses do come available to us every so often, but not like it used to be. Now we're lucky to get one structure a year."