



## **2005 Wildland Fire Season Talking Points**

**April 20, 2005**

**NOTE: A NEW WILDLAND FIRE OUTLOOK WILL BE ISSUED NATIONALLY BY PREDICTIVE SERVICES ON APRIL 27, 2005. THIS WILL BE POST ON THE NIFC.GOV WEBSITE.**

## Safety:

- **Communications:**
  - The National Interagency Incident Communications radio cache is now operating according to legal mandate on narrowband frequencies. Firefighters should be skilled in operating radios between narrowband and wide-band on incidents.
  
- **Driving Operations:**
  - No driver will drive more than ten hours (behind the wheel) within any duty day. Multiple drivers in a single vehicle may drive up to the duty day limit as long as no one person exceeds the ten hour limitation.
  - A driver will only drive if he/she had at least eight consecutive hours off duty before beginning a shift. Exceptions apply only to immediate and critical needs for suppression objectives or for firefighter and public safety.
  
- **Refresher:**
  - The annual fireline safety refresher training for this coming fire season will emphasize the use of tactical decision exercises including sand table exercises (STEX), computer simulated initial attack training, and Staff Rides designed to enhance decision-making skills, analysis of human factors and communication.
  
- **Work-Rest Guidelines:**
  - The Work-Rest Guidelines have not changed. The 2:1 work to rest ratio is still valid and will be followed. The guidelines state that for every two hours worked, one hour of rest will be provided to incident personnel. In addition, two days of R&R are required after 14 working days.
  - However flexibility to exceed the guidelines is allowed when warranted under specific circumstances. Narrow exemptions will be granted by agreement of the incident management personnel and the responsible agency administrator.
  - Work-Rest Guidelines apply to all federal wildland firefighting agencies, state personnel and cooperators.
  
- **Federal Interagency Wildland Fire Management Policy:**
  - Protection of human lives is our first priority. Protection of property and natural and cultural resources follows. These priorities, in order, serve as a guide for the commitment of resources for wildland fire management actions. Some basic principles are:
    - “Firefighter and Public Safety is the first priority.” ALL Fire Management Plan and activities must reflect this commitment.
    - Firefighter safety comes first on every fire every time
    - The Ten Standard Firefighting Orders are firm; we don’t break them; we don’t bend them
    - Every firefighter has the right to a safe assignment
    - Every agency administrator, every fire manager, every fireline supervisor, and every firefighter is responsible to ensure that established safety practices are known and observed.

## **Standard Firefighting Orders**

The Standard Firefighting Orders were based in part on the successful "General Orders" used by the United States Armed Forces. The Standard Firefighting Orders are organized in a deliberate and sequential way to be implemented systematically and applied to all fire situations. Although the sequence of the 10 Firefighting Orders has changed over the last few years, in 2003 NWCG formally adopted the orders in their original order:

- Keep informed on fire weather conditions and forecasts.
- Know what your fire is doing at all times.
- Base all actions on current and expected behavior of the fire.
- Identify escape routes and safety zones and make them known.
- Post lookouts when there is possible danger.
- Be alert. Keep calm. Think clearly. Act decisively.
- Maintain prompt communications with your forces, your supervisor, and adjoining forces.
- Give clear instructions and insure they are understood.
- Maintain control of your forces at all times.
- Fight fire aggressively, having provided for safety first.

## Aviation Assets:

In 2004, the Forest Service terminated contracts for 33 airtankers due to concerns about the airworthiness of firefighting aircraft. After a review of individual airtankers by DynCorp, the Forest Service and BLM returned eight P-3 Orion aircraft to service last summer. Two additional P2V aircraft were also activated to collect operational load and maneuvering stress data.

- Over the years, we have increased the numbers of helicopters and single engine airtankers (SEATS) in firefighting support.
- The optimum mix of fixed and rotor wing aircraft is determined by the characteristics of each fire. Both tools are valuable in fire management missions.
- We are confident that we have the assets in place or available to respond to the air support needs of the ground firefighters.

### Key Fleet Components:

- The request for proposal (RFP) for heavy airtankers was advertised on January 28, 2005 asking for bids on up to 20 aircraft: ten airtankers for 180 days, five for 140 days, and five for 100 days. Seven P-3 airtankers were awarded contract as of March 30, 2005. In April, 2 P2Vs and one DC-7 were awarded contracts to return on a limited basis (outside heavily populated areas/areas with congested airspace) to gather operational loads data as they fly retardant missions.
- The Forest Service bought and installed Traffic Collision Avoidance Systems. We will install Operational Load Monitoring Equipment in all activated airtankers to gather additional safety data.
- Large airtankers will be downloaded by 15% by weight as part of the contract.
- Consistent with the National Transportation Safety Board recommendations, the Forest Service is contracting for additional work to determine if the Operational Service Life (OSL) of each of the P2V and Douglas airtankers can be calculated. The OSL is the timeframe during which no significant reduction in structure strength occurs due to fatigue.
- The contract for OSL work for the P2Vs was awarded on January 25, 2005 to Avenger. Contracts for the Douglas aircraft are being negotiated. Numbers of aircraft will vary according to what is submitted to the contractors. Information may be known as early as June, 2005 that would allow some aircraft to return to service.
- **Type I Helicopters** – Six Type I exclusive use helicopters have been contracted. Converting to Call When Needed (CWN) contracts to exclusive use is an option and will result in significant cost savings if these ships are needed.
- **Type II Helicopters** – Up to 24 Type II helicopters are expected to be available through Forest Service regional contracts.
- **Cooperative agreements with State and Interagency partners** includes 2 exclusive use CL 215 airtankers, 24 exclusive use SEATs, 70 CWN SEATs and 2 CWN CL215s.
- **Modular Airborne Fire Fighting System (MAFFS)**-Eight MAFFS units are available for use in military C-130 aircraft.

## Contract Crews:

Wildland fire management agencies have used contract fire crews since the 1980s. However, with the proliferation in the number of contract fire crews, both hiring States and agencies have been continuously challenged with making the overall program more effective.

- Among the challenges is developing and enforcing effective contract requirements that address: language barriers, qualifications, training, work performance, and record-keeping.
- All firefighters have a voice where safety is concerned. All firefighters have the right and responsibility to speak up whenever safety concerns arise. It is the agencies' responsibility to ensure contract related safety problems are immediately addressed upon their identification and notification.
- Both the agencies and other organizations that use contract wildland firefighters have systems in place to identify and remedy performance-based issues. On incidents, Incident Commanders and Safety Officers have the authority to pull any firefighters or crews off the line if they are not performing in a safe or effective manner - regardless of crew type or affiliation.
- All wildland fire crews represent a wide cross-section of performance, qualifications and experience. While there are differences in experience and skill levels, the bulk of all wildland firefighters are reliable, well trained and provide a much-needed service.
- All wildland firefighting crews must perform to standards set by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group. Federal agencies have the responsibility to offer annual refresher and safety training to agency firefighters. Wildland fire crew contractors are responsible for training and educating their employees to NWCG standard as well. Contract trainers must be fully qualified as wildfire instructors and meet additional NWCG standards as well.
- The federal agencies consistently work with state partners in pursuing improvements in the current contracting programs. Before each western fire season begins, the federal agencies and states perform reviews of contractors.
- Agencies can authorize "negotiated competitive contracts," which gives preference to the higher performing contractors.
- Several approaches have been enacted to improve performance of contract firefighting resources:
  - Strengthened contract requirements.
  - Increased inspections of equipment and reviews of documentation.
  - Identifying consistent high performance contractors and their crews.
  - Penalizing violators of contract standards and guidelines.
  - Encouraging firefighters to report unsafe working practices.
  - Requiring performance evaluations on all crews after each incident.

## **Cost Containment:**

- Fires are suppressed at minimum cost, considering firefighter and public safety, benefits, and values to be protected, consistent with resource objectives.
- An Incident Business Advisor (IBA) must be assigned to any fire with projected suppression costs of more than \$5 million. An IBA is advised for fires with suppression costs of \$1-5 million. If a certified IBA is not available, the approving official will appoint a financial advisor to monitor expenditures. The IBA reports directly to the responsible Agency Administrator.
- Some fires are being analyzed for the appropriate response action of confinement suppression (rather than full control) and wildland fire use. When the NEPA-compliant plans are in place, the opportunity exists to consider resource benefits as the objectives of the fire management strategy. These fires would be monitored and kept within specific parameters outlined in the local unit's Fire Management Plan. These fires must be in areas that does not threaten communities or damage natural resources.
- All Type 1 Incident Management Teams and many Type 2 Incident Management Teams are staffing Cost Unit Leader positions and using Incident Cost And Reporting System (ICARS) software to make daily incident cost projections, determine cost centers, and make recommendations for cost efficient management such as prompt release of under-utilized equipment and aircraft and tracking excessive personnel and equipment shift lengths.
- Prevention teams have decreased human-caused fire occurrence in many drought areas, and many potentially large, costly fires are being controlled in extended attack with the additional severity resources.
- The Forest Service has requested the Office of Inspector General to perform third-party audits on our large fires (over \$5 million). The purpose of the request is to assist the FS in identifying areas where cost efficiencies can be gained.

## **Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy Implementation:**

Several differences existed among the federal wildland fire management agencies in the implementation of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy. Discussions have led to consensus among the five federal wildland fire management agencies with regard to a number of policy issues (Note: Tribally-operated programs may choose to implement some policies differently than the five federal agencies with wildland fire management programs). The following statements clarify the implementation of agency policy.

- Only one management objective will be applied to a wildland fire. Wildland fires will either be managed for resource benefits or suppressed. A wildland fire cannot be managed for both objectives concurrently. If two wildland fires converge, they will be managed as a single wildland fire.
- Human caused wildland fires will be suppressed in every instance and will not be managed for resource benefits.
- Once a fire has been managed for suppression objectives, it may never be managed for resource benefit objectives.
- The Appropriate Management Response (AMR) is any specific action suitable to meet Fire Management Unit (FMU) objectives. Typically, the AMR ranges across a spectrum of tactical options (from monitoring to intensive management actions). The AMR is developed by using FMU strategies and objectives identified in the Fire Management Plan.
- The Wildland Fire Situation Analysis is to be used to document the suppression strategy from the full range of responses available for suppression operations. Suppression strategies are designed to meet the policy objectives of suppression.
- Wildland fire use is the result of a natural event. The Land/Resource Management Plan, or the Fire Management Plan, will identify areas where the strategy of wildland fire use is suitable. The Wildland Fire Implementation Plan (WFIP) is the tool that examines the available response strategies to determine if a fire is being considered for wildland fire use.
- When a prescribed fire or a fire designated for wildland fire use is no longer achieving the intended resource management objectives and contingency or mitigation actions have failed, the fire will be declared a wildfire. Once a wildfire, it cannot be returned to prescribed fire or wildland fire use status.

## Fire Prevention

### *Firewise* Defensible Space Concepts:

- Keep a clearing of at least 30 feet around your house for fire fighting equipment. Keep ample turnaround space near your house for fire equipment.
- Create "fuelbreak" - - - driveways, gravel walkways, or lawns.
- Remove "ladder fuels". They link the grasses and the tree tops.
- Prune tree limbs so the lowest is between 6' - 10' from the ground. Dispose of cuttings and debris promptly, according to local regulations.
- Remove leaf clutter from your roof and yard. Remove dead or overhanging branches.
- Store firewood away from your house. Store and use flammable liquids properly.
- Don't keep combustible materials under decks or elevated porches.
- Mark your driveway and access roads clearly.
- Prevent sparks from entering your house by covering vents with wire mesh 1/8" or smaller.
- When possible, use construction materials that are fire-resistant or non-combustible.

## Fire Safety

### Building and Putting Out a Campfire:

- Build campfires away from overhanging branches, steep slopes, rotten stumps, logs, dry grass and leaves. Pile any extra wood away from the fires.
- Keep plenty of water handy and have a shovel for throwing dirt on the fire if it gets out of control.
- Start with dry twigs and small sticks. Add larger sticks as the fire builds up.
- Put the largest pieces of wood on last, pointing them toward the center of the fire, and gradually push them into the flames.
- Keep the campfire small. A good bed of coals or a small fire surrounded by rocks gives plenty of heat. Scrape away litter, duff, and any burnable material within a 10-foot-diameter circle. This will keep a small campfire from spreading.
- Be sure your match is out. Hold it until it is cold. Break it so that you can feel the charred portion before discarding it. Make sure it is cold out.
- Never leave a campfire unattended. Even a small breeze could quickly cause the fire to spread.
- Drown the fire with water. Make sure all embers, coals, and sticks are wet. Move rocks around to check for burning embers underneath.
- Stir the remains, add more water, and stir again. Be sure all burned material has been extinguished and cooled. Use dirt if you do not have water. Mix enough soil or sand with the embers. Continue adding and stirring until all material is cooled.
- Feel all materials with your bare hand. Make sure that no roots are burning. Do not bury your coals because they can smolder and break out.

### **Charcoal Briquettes:**

- After using the burning charcoal briquettes, "dunk 'em!" - don't sprinkle. Soak the coals with lots of water, stir them and soak again. Be sure they are out cold! Carefully feel the coals with your bare hands to be sure.

### **Smoking:**

- When smoking is permitted outdoors, safe practices require at least a 3-foot clearing around the smoker. Grind out your cigarette, cigar, or pipe tobacco in the dirt. Never grind it on a stump or log. Use your ashtray while in your car.

### **Lanterns, Stoves, and Heaters:**

- Cool all lanterns, stoves, and heaters before refueling. Place them on the ground in a cleared area to fill them. If fuel spills, move the appliance to a new clearing before lighting it. Recap and store flammable liquid containers in a safe place. Never light lanterns and stoves inside a tent, trailer or camper. If you use a lantern or stove inside a tent or trailer be sure to have adequate ventilation. Always read and follow instructions provided by the manufacturer.

### **Spark Arresters:**

- All types of equipment and vehicles including chain saws, portable generators, cross-country vehicles, and trail bikes require spark arresters if used in or near grass, brush or a wooded area. To make sure that the spark arrester is functioning properly check with the dealer or contact your local Forest Service or State forestry office.

### **Agricultural Residue, Debris and Forest Litter Burning:**

- Consider the alternatives to burning. Some types of debris such as leaves, grass, and stubble may be of more value if used for compost. Household items such as plastics, glass, paper, and aluminum cans can be recycled or hauled to a local sanitary landfill.
- Be sure you are fully prepared before burning your field or garden spot. To control the fire, you will need a source of water, a bucket, and a shovel for tossing dirt on the fire.
- If possible, a fire line should be plowed around the area to be burned. Large fields should be separated into small plots for burning individually. Stay with your fire until it is out.
- Contact your local forester before doing any burning in a wooded area. The forester will weigh all factors, explain them to you, and offer technical advice.

## Fire Shelters:

- Firefighter training will continue to stress entrapment avoidance and risk mitigation. Firefighters are taught that the shelter is the tool of last resort, and firefighters should never put themselves in a situation where the shelter is needed.
- The new generation fire shelter provides better protection against radiant heat and direct flame, but is not a guarantee of survival in intense wildland fire conditions. The new generation fire shelter is .6 pounds heavier and about 25% thicker than the original shelter, but folds up to almost the same size. The redesigned shelter showed a 22% reduction in temperature rise in radiant heat when compared to the current shelter, an 81% reduction in temperature rise in the convective heat test, and an improved resistance to puncture and tearing.
- The New Generation Fire Shelter redesign project started in January 2000. The new shelter system, which includes the fire shelter, training shelter, video and booklet, became available to firefighters in 2003.
- Tearing of the floor material near the shake handle area was found during training deployments of the shelter in the spring of 2004. A recall was ordered and a retrofit was designed and implemented in conjunction with GSA and the two sewing contractors. About 68,000 fire shelters were recalled and retrofitted, and are now available to firefighters. A complete transition from the old shelter to the New Generation shelter for all firefighters is expected to take another 1 to 3 years.
- The original fire shelters remain more than adequate, as long as they are used according to guidelines. As they are turned in by federal firefighters, they will be inspected and then redistributed to local fire agencies, which may not have any fire shelters for use.
- The original fire shelters have been used since the 1970s, and have saved the lives of more than 250 firefighters, and prevented hundreds more serious injuries. Fire shelters are designed for deployment where fuels are sparse or can be removed and the ground cleared where they will be deployed. The shelters are not designed to withstand direct flame.
- A new large-sized fire shelter for use by firefighters who find the regular-sized shelter to be a tight fit will be available through GSA this summer (2005). It is recommended that people over 6'1" in height obtain and carry a large-size fire shelter. The large shelter will provide better protection to bigger people by allowing less contact of the shelter material with an occupant's body, by providing more air space between the shelter and an occupant, and by reducing the stress on the shelter material caused when a larger person stretches out inside the shelter.

## Hazardous Fuels

The President's Healthy Forests Initiative, the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy, the Healthy Forests Restoration Act and the National Fire Plan establish goals for reducing hazardous fuels. Reducing risk to firefighters, communities, municipal watersheds and restoring the health of public and tribal lands are the central themes of these initiatives.

- The most effective means of reducing large fire suppression costs, protecting community values, restoring forest and grassland health, and improving firefighter safety is an aggressive fuel treatment program.
- Treatments are particularly important in fire-dependent ecosystems, where prolonged fire exclusion has resulted in over-accumulated fuels. The agencies will continue to emphasize fuel treatments in high priority areas where communities, watersheds, and critical resources are at risk.
- Hazardous fuels are treated using appropriate tools to reduce the risk of unplanned and unwanted wildland fire to communities and the environment.
- The U.S.D.A. Forest Service and the Department of the Interior agencies treated 4.2 million acres in 2004. 2.4 million of these acres were in the wildland/urban interface.
- The safest, most effective wildfire protection strategy is predicated on an aggressive fuels reduction program using a variety of mitigation methods (including mechanical, biological, chemical, prescribed fire, etc). In fire-dependent ecosystems, the use of prescribed fire at ecologically appropriate intensities is an essential means of restoring forest health conditions. Mechanical hazard mitigation treatments may often be required before prescribed fire projects can be implemented within acceptable limits of social, economic, and ecological risk.
- Prescribed fires and wildland fires that aim to achieve resource benefits must be accompanied by supporting NEPA compliant plans.

## **Military Support:**

**National Guard:** Although much of the military, including National Guard and Reserves are fulfilling an important mission overseas, there is no indication that those forces will not be available to assist in firefighting efforts should the need arise. There is no way of knowing at this time when and if they'll be needed.

- With the recent extension of National Guard forces overseas, and additional troops placed on alert in the U.S., there has been some concern about the impact on firefighting resources during the upcoming fire season. This is being discussed as a particular concern by Oregon state officials.
- The three Air National Guard and one Air Force Reserve units that provide aerial support to firefighting with the eight MAFFs units will be available this summer as needed.
- National Guard forces are activated in each state by the governor and they do provide a valuable role when needed during wildfire operations, but they are rarely used as firefighters in suppression operations. Rather, they provide logistical support in the form of transportation for crews and equipment.
- With few exceptions, such as in Montana where two crews of National Guard troops have been specifically trained for fireline operations, and in a few other areas where National Guard helicopters have been utilized for tactical operations, National Guard troops provide a valuable support function other than on the fireline.
- The deployment of National Guard troops overseas will not significantly impact fireline operations. The transportation and support function filled as needed by National Guard forces may be contracted from resources in the private sector.
- Open lines of communication between federal firefighting agencies, governors, and military leaders will be maintained as the fire season progresses.

### **Active Duty:**

- The Department of Defense has assured the federal wildland firefighting agencies that two battalions will be made available if need this summer through the existing cooperative agreement.

## **Minimum Age Requirements for Hazardous Duty Assignments on Wildland Fire Management Operations on Federal Jurisdictions:**

- Current Guidance in the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) *Interagency Incident Business Management Handbook* states that 16 and 17 year olds may be hired and assigned only non-hazardous or non-arduous duties. This is the guidance that the federal agencies need to follow.
- Whenever there is an accident the investigation always considers whether we have adhered to our established guidelines. It is important to follow the established guidance unless there is a compelling safety reason not to.
- In accordance with current federal guidance, persons under 18 years old will not perform hazardous or arduous duties during wildland fire management operations on federal jurisdictions.
- On incidents where the state has fire protection jurisdiction (may include federal lands), states may use youth crews with persons under 18 years old if their respective state law so allows.
- During initial attack, the agencies agree to accept each other's standards. Once jurisdiction is established, fire personnel will follow the jurisdictional standards.
- A number of states have programs that allow youth under 18 to take hazardous and/or arduous fire assignments. The age and other conditions for allowing persons under 18 to participate in fire assignments vary by state so there are no consistent standards across state governments.

## Preparedness:

- The Interagency Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy directs the federal wildland fire agencies and states to assure safe, cost effective fire management programs in support of land and resource management plans through appropriate planning, staffing, training, equipment, and management oversight.
- Personnel are trained and qualified for the emergency response positions that they are assigned.
- All units will adjust staffing levels based on observed and predicted fire danger to maintain protection capabilities. Staffing levels will be coordinated with adjacent cooperators.
- For unplanned wildfires, our objective will remain 99% initial/extended attack success rate in 2005.
- Initial attack operations will be the number one mobilization priority. All efforts will be made to use predictive services, anticipate threats, and preposition protection resources.
- Predictive Services units on the geographic and national level will be key in assessing fire activity risk so that decision makers can pre-position resources.
- Interagency cooperation is a keystone for national responses to wildland fire. National interagency resources include:
  - 4 Area Command Teams
  - 17 Type I Incident Management Teams
  - 38 Type 2 Incident Management Teams
  - 430 Smokejumpers
  - 92 Hotshot Crews (including trainee crews)

## **Retardant:**

There is currently ongoing litigation surrounding the contracting, suppliers and use of aerial retardant.

- Retardant does not put fires out. It blocks oxygen from the fire. It slows down the rate of spread to give crews on the ground a chance to build a line around the fire. In some situations it can help protect structures, especially when dropped from helicopters with pinpoint accuracy hovering directly above the fire or building.
- In 2005, we will no longer issue contracts for retardant with sodium ferrocyanide as an ingredient. Studies show that this chemical does increase retardant's toxicity to fish in the presence of solar ultraviolet radiation. (Also known as YPS which is an ingredient in a long-term fire retardant.)
- Aerial retardant application guidelines require a 300 foot buffer around lakes, streams and ponds.
- This process is working. Out of hundreds of thousands of retardant drops since the 1990's, there have only been eight known cases of retardant getting into water. Not all of those eight resulted in fish kills.
- Retardant is often dropped on ridgetops, to stop fires before they go over the top and down into next canyon. Streams are down in the bottoms of the canyons, well below the drop zone.

## Wildland Fire Use:

- Wildland Fire Use (WFU): The application of the Appropriate Management Response to naturally ignited wildfires to accomplish specific resource management objectives as outlined in Fire Management Plans.
- WFU fires are used for resource benefits including maintenance of healthy forests, rangelands and wetlands, and to support ecosystem diversity.
- Fire is an important and inevitable part of the wildlands. It is now widely recognized that we must restore fire to many areas from which it has been excluded.
- Effective use of wildland fire will provide substantial benefits to society and the environment. When burnable fuels are reduced by wildland fire use, the benefits include:
  - Increased safety for wildland firefighters and the public through reduced fuels that lead to large, dangerous wildfires;
  - Reduced effects of smoke on public health and visibility;
  - Minimized damage from wildland fire;
  - Reduced costs of wildland fire management;
  - Protection of plants and animals that depend of fire; and
  - Improved habitats and watersheds
- WFU fires are managed using a Wildland Fire Implementation Plan (WFIP). Elements of the plan include implementation actions, resources, limitations, predictions for fire behavior, risk assessment and contingencies required for successful management of a WFU.
- WFU fires are closely monitored to ensure the fire stays within the planned area boundaries and meets the characteristics of the prescription.
- WFU fires are often long duration events which require public understanding of smoke events, temporary inconveniences regarding travel, and potential closure of public use areas.