



National Interagency Fire Center

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August 18, 2012

To: Geographic Area Coordinating Group Chairs
From: National Multi Agency Coordinating Group
Subject: Safety Message

During the past week we have experienced a fatality, an entrapment, and several close calls on wildfires. In an effort to draw attention to wildland firefighter safety, NMAC is requesting that all geographic areas redouble efforts to emphasize safety practices.

Firefighter safety is and continues to be our first priority. The commitment to and accountability for safety is a joint responsibility of all firefighters, leaders, managers, and administrators. Individuals must be responsible for their own performance and accountability.

Suggested areas of emphasis are:

- Aggressive risk management is our primary means of maintaining safe wildland fire operations. Consistently evaluate fireline tactics and do not hesitate to adjust tactics as environmental and human factor conditions change -- Review Risk Management Process in IRPG, Page 1.
- Situational Awareness (SA) is a key component of risk management and must be maintained at all times. Conduct SA briefings to brainstorm and consider specific ways in which you can increase awareness of the hazards you face. Evaluate the hazards involved with your activities and mitigate for these hazards to reduce exposure to an acceptable level of risk for firefighters and others. Achieve and maintain good SA both individually, within your crew, and between different types of resources.
- LCES must be maintained on every mission, including scouting and patrol assignments.
- Rapid, unexpected changes in fire behavior kill wildland firefighters. Always identify the worst case scenario and be prepared for it by maintaining focused SA, setting realistic trigger points, and withdrawing when prudent. Do not hesitate to use your fire shelter when you feel the need exists.
- Exercise extreme caution when working in timber canopy areas -- assume every tree has some level of hazard associated with it. Review **“PRINCIPLES OF HAZARD TREE RISK MANAGEMENT”** at:
http://www.nwcg.gov/teams/shwt/httf/training_education/s212/ht-risk-mgmt.pdf
- Do not allow for a false sense of security in finer fuel types—many fatalities and entrapments have occurred in areas of fine and sparse fuels. Terrain and wind can produce extreme fire behavior in this fuel type.

- Carefully consider your Medivac Plan. Ensure all personnel are familiar with the Dutch Creek Protocols, and ensure plans are realistic with adequate resources available to support them in a timely manner.
- Dehydration, Hyperthermia, and Fatigue – constantly monitor firefighter’s water and electrolyte intake to avoid dehydration episodes. Dehydration and long work hours, coupled with poor air quality and high temperatures all impact fatigue -- monitor and provide rest opportunities for firefighters and support personnel. Hydration alone may not be enough to prevent hyperthermia. Monitor core body temperature and provide breaks in the shade or in an air conditioned vehicle when needed
- Driving standards and limitations must be applied and enforced. Drivers should not be exceeding 10 hours behind the wheel driving time (state CDL limitations may be more stringent). This applies to all drivers including agency employees, ADs, and contractors. Every effort should be made to avoid driving between 2200 and 0500 hours.
- Communication is vital – resources must be briefed upon arriving at the fire. Communications during all phases of operations must be maintained. Incoming crews must be briefed prior to becoming available for fire assignment.
- As the fire season remains active, be mindful of chronic fatigue issues and consider additional days off between assignments for fire personnel.

I ask that every fire manager take time to emphasize firefighter safety and appropriate risk management. We appreciate all the efforts of every firefighter and support personnel. Let’s do everything in our power to return everyone home safely this fire season.

/s/ John Segar
Chair, NMAC