

United States
Department
of Agriculture

Forest Service



GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN INVESTIGATIONS

Accident – An unplanned event that results in an injury, illness, or damage to Forest Service property involving Forest Service employees, volunteers, youth program members, contractors, cooperators, emergency personnel, or the public.

Accident Review Board – The Accident Review Board is an internal Forest Service entity that serves as an independent evaluating body representing Forest Service management regarding an accident or incident.

Aerially Delivered Firefighters – Aerially delivered firefighters are smokejumpers, helitack, crewmembers, rappellers, or other personnel deployed by aircraft to wildland fires or other prescribed burns. Accidents associated with aerial delivery systems will be considered aircraft related if they occur before personnel have safely reached the ground.

Anchor Point – An advantageous location, usually a barrier to fire spread, from which to start constructing a fireline. The anchor point is used to minimize the chance of being flanked by the fire while the line is being constructed.

Blowup – Sudden increase in fireline intensity or rate of spread of a fire sufficient to preclude direct control or to upset existing suppression plans. Often accompanied by violent convection and may have other characteristics of a fire storm.

Briefing, Expanded (72-hour) – This document contains a brief narrative of the accident based on factual information gathered at the site. The document is drafted by the chief investigator within 72 hours after the team arrives at the accident site and is released under the signature of the team leader. The team leader sends the expanded briefing to the safety manager at the organizational level that authorized the investigation. This information is subject to change and may contain errors. Any errors will be corrected when the factual report is completed.

Briefing Preliminary (24-hour) – This document contains the first details of the accident. It is prepared by the chief investigator and transmitted within 24 hours of the team's arrival by the team leader to the safety manager at the organizational level that authorized the investigation. This information is subject to change, and may contain errors. Any errors will be corrected when the factual report is completed.

Causal Factor – A causal factor is an act, omission, condition, or circumstance that either starts or sustains an accident sequence. A causal factor may be related to persons, or machines. A given act, omission, condition, or circumstance is a causal factor if correcting, eliminating, or avoiding it would prevent the accident or mitigate damage or injury.

Cause – A cause is an act, omission, condition, or circumstance that starts or sustains an accident sequence. A cause may be related to persons or machines. A given act, omission, or circumstance is a cause if correcting, eliminating, or avoiding it would prevent the accident or mitigate damage or serious injury. An environmental condition may be a cause if it was not reasonably avoided.

Collateral Investigation – A collateral investigation is an independent, concurrent investigation of a management issue that becomes known during the factual investigation that has no direct causal relationship to the accident. The investigation team leader will notify the appropriate line officer that an issue or issues with management implications has been discovered and will need to be investigated. This notification may result in a collateral investigation.

Entrapment – The National Wildfire Coordinating Group defines entrapment as a situation where personnel are unexpectedly caught in a fire-behavior-related, life threatening position where planned escape routes and safety zones are absent, inadequate, or have been compromised. An entrapment may or may not include deployment of a fire shelter for its intended purpose. These situations may or may not result in injury.

Equipment – A term used to describe the “hardware” involved in an accident, such as vehicles, systems, and equipment.

Extended Attack – Situation in which a fire cannot be controlled by initial attack resources within a reasonable period of time. The fire can usually be controlled by additional resources within 24 hours after commencing suppression action.

Fatal Injury – Any injury that results in death within 30 days of the accident.

Findings – Findings are the conclusions of the investigation team. They are based on the weight of evidence, the investigation team’s professional knowledge, and their best judgment. They are statements of significant events or conditions leading to the accident. They are arranged in chronological order. Each finding is an essential step in the event sequence, but each finding is not necessarily a causal factor.

Fire Operations Accident – An accident occurring as a result of actions taken to confine, contain, or control wildfire, or to ignite, monitor, or otherwise manage a prescribed burn that results in serious injury, hospitalization, or a fatality.

Fire Operations Incident – An incident that occurs as a result of actions taken to confine, contain, or control wildfire, or ignite, monitor, or otherwise manage prescribed burn.

First Aid – Any medical treatment provided that does not involve a medical bill. If a physician prescribes medical treatment for charges for this service, that injury becomes one requiring “medical attention”.

Forest Service Property – Includes lands and resources managed by the Forest Service and privately owned and commercially leased or rented motor vehicles, watercraft, aircraft, specialized equipment, or any other motor vehicle used for official business.

Fuel Moisture Content – The quantity of moisture in fuel expressed as a percentage of the weight when thoroughly dried at 212 degrees F.

Hazard – A condition associated with an operation that poses an avoidable or unacceptable threat to the safety of personnel, equipment, or property, but has not yet resulted in an accident.

Incident – An occurrence, either human-caused or natural phenomena, that requires action or support by emergency service personnel to prevent or minimize loss of life or damage to property and/or natural resources.

Incident Command System (ICS) – A standardized on-scene emergency management concept specifically designed to allow its user(s) to adopt an integrated organizational structure equal to the complexity and demands of single or multiple incidents, without being hindered by jurisdictional boundaries.

Initial Attack – The actions taken by the first resources to arrive at a wildfire to protect lives and property, and prevent further extension of the fire.

Lookout – (1) A person designated to detect and report fires from a vantage point. (2) A location from which fires can be detected and reported. (3) A fire crew member assigned to observe the fire and warn the crew when there is danger of becoming trapped.

Management Evaluation Report – A management documentation tool for gathering information to develop action plans and make appropriate policy decisions that can help prevent future accidents or incidents.

Medical Attention – An injury, less than a serious injury, for which a physician prescribes medical treatment and charges for the service.

Thirty-Mile Fire Information

Mop-up – Extinguishing or removing burning material near control lines, felling snags, and trenching logs to prevent rolling after an area has burned, to make a fire safe, or to reduce residual smoke.

Occupational Illness – A physiological harm or loss of capacity produced by systemic infection; continued stress or strain; exposure to toxins, poisons, fumes, and so forth, or other continued and repeated exposures to conditions of the work environment over a long period of time. For practical purposes, an occupational illness is any reported condition that does not meet the definition of occupational injury.

Occupational Injury – A wound or other condition of the body caused by external force, including stress or strain. The time and place the injury occurred and the part of the body or bodily function affected can be identified. An occupational injury is caused by a specific event or series of events within a single day or work shift.

Safety Zone – An area cleared of flammable materials used for escape in the event the line is outflanked or in case a spot fire causes fuels outside the control line to render the line unsafe. In firing operations, crews progress so as to maintain a safety zone close at hand allowing the fuels inside the control line to be consumed before going ahead. Safety zones may be also constructed as integral parts of fuel breaks; they are greatly enlarged areas which can be used with relative safety by firefighters and their equipment in the event of a blowup in the vicinity.

Serious Accident – Any accident that involves either:

- A death
- Three or more persons hospitalized for other than observation
- Property damage that exceeds \$250,000

Abbreviations Used in Investigations

ARB – Accident Review Board

CFR – Code of Federal Regulations

CI – Chief Investigator

CISD – Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

DASHO – Designated Agency Safety and Health Official

DOI – U.S. Department of the Interior

FOIA – Freedom of Information Act

FS—Forest Service

FSM – Forest Service Manual

GPS – Global Positioning System

ICP – Incident Command Post

JHA – Job Hazard Analysis

MER – Management Evaluation Report

NFES – National Fire Equipment System

NFFE – National Federation of Federal Employees

NFPA – National Fire Protection Association

NIOSH – National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health

NWCG – National Wildfire Coordinating Group

NWS – National Weather Service

OSHA – Occupational Safety and Health Administration

PPE – Personal Protective Equipment and clothing

RO – Regional Office

SES – Senior Executive Service

SM – Safety Manager

TL – Team Leader

USDA – US Department of Agriculture

WO – Washington Office