

1 – Overview & Program Directives

Introduction

Scope

These standards apply to the all signatories of this document. They are designed to ensure safe and efficient wildland fire, fuels, and fire aviation operations. This document is reviewed annually and updated as needed. Exceptions and/or supplemental direction to the *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations* are found in agency specific manuals and handbooks as referenced in individual chapters of this document.

Purpose

This document provides a reference for current operational policies, procedures, and guidelines for managing wildland fire and fire aviation operations. Employees engaged in fire management activities will follow all safety standards and guidelines in their agency specific health and safety guides and handbooks. All employees engaged in fire suppression activities will adhere to standards and mitigate risks defined in the *Incident Response Pocket Guide* (PMS #461, NFES #1077).

Policy

The following policies are accepted and endorsed by the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior. They provide consistent fire management practices among federal wildland fire management agencies fire operations.

Safety

- Firefighter and public safety is the first priority. All Fire Management Plans (FMPs) and activities must reflect this commitment.
- All fire personnel will meet appropriate training, experience, and qualifications requirements for incident assignments. (See *NWCG 310-1*, *DOI Incident Qualification and Certification System*, and *FSH 5109-17*.)
- All fire personnel will be equipped with approved personal protective equipment (PPE) appropriate to their position.
- All agency personnel assigned to fireline duties will complete annual refresher training.
- All wildland fire entrapments and fatalities will be reported using the current National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) initial entrapment/fatality report form.
- All wildland fire serious accidents will be investigated using the agency serious accident investigation procedures and interagency agreements as appropriate.
- Follow all safety policies, standards, and guidelines identified within the *Interagency Incident Business Management Handbook (IIBMH)*, *Fireline Handbook*, *Interagency Helicopter Operations Guide (IHOG)*, *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations*, and *Incident Response Pocket Guide*.

USFS – Code of Conduct for Fire Suppression:

Firefighter safety comes first every fire every time. The Ten Standard Firefighting Orders are firm. We don't break them, we don't bend them. All 18 Watch Out Situations must be mitigated before engagement or re-engagement of wildland fire suppression activities. Every firefighter has the right to know that his or her assignments are safe. Every fireline supervisor, every fire manager, and every administrator has the responsibility to confirm that safe practices are known and observed.

Fire Management and Ecosystem Sustainability

The full range of fire management activities will be used to help achieve ecosystem sustainability, including interrelated ecological, economic, and social components.

Response to Wildland Fire

Fire, as a critical natural process, will be integrated into land and resource management plans and activities on a landscape scale, and across agency boundaries. Response to wildland fire is based on ecological, social, and legal consequences of the fire. The circumstances under which a fire occurs, and the likely consequences for firefighter and public safety and welfare, natural and cultural resources, and values to be protected dictate the appropriate management response to the fire.

Use of Wildland Fire

Wildland fire will be used to protect, maintain, and enhance resources and, when possible, be allowed to function in its natural ecological role. Use of fire will be based on approved FMPs, and will follow specific prescriptions contained in operational plans.

Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation

Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation efforts will be undertaken to protect and sustain ecosystems, public health and safety, and to help communities protect infrastructure in the most cost-effective manner.

Protection Priorities

The protection of human life is the single, overriding priority. Setting priorities among protecting human communities and community infrastructure, other property and improvements, and natural and cultural resources will be based on the values to be protected, human health and safety, and the costs of protection. Once people have been assigned to an incident, these human resources become the highest value to be protected.

Wildland Urban Interface

The operational roles of federal agencies as partners in the Wildland Urban Interface are wildland firefighting, hazardous fuels reduction, cooperative prevention and education, and technical assistance. Structural fire suppression is the responsibility of tribal, state, or local governments. Federal agencies may assist with exterior structural protection activities under formal interagency agreements that specify the mutual responsibilities of the partners, including funding. For agency specific direction and exceptions see Chapter 11.

Planning

Every area with burnable vegetation must have an approved FMP. Fire Management Plans are strategic plans that define a program to manage wildland and prescribed fires based on the area's approved land management plan. Fire Management Plans must: provide for firefighter and public safety; include fire management strategies, tactics, and alternatives; address values to be protected and public health issues; and be consistent with resource management objectives, activities of the area, and environmental laws and regulations.

Science

Fire Management Plans and programs will be based on a foundation of the best available science. Research will support ongoing efforts to increase our scientific knowledge of biological, physical, and sociological factors. Information needed to support fire management will be developed through an integrated interagency fire science program. Scientific results must be made available to managers in a timely manner and must be used in the development of land management plans, FMPs, and implementation plans.

Preparedness

Agencies will ensure their capability to provide safe, cost-effective fire management programs in support of land and resource management plans through appropriate planning, staffing, training, equipment, and management oversight.

- Preparedness planning must be accomplished annually at all organizational levels.
- When conditions exceed those of the normal fire year, severity planning must be developed to consider agency needs on a local, geographic, and national basis.
- Annual operating plans and unit operating procedures will be updated annually.
- Preparedness reviews will be conducted annually.

Suppression

Fires are suppressed at minimum cost, considering firefighter and public safety, benefits, and values to be protected.

- Fire management will use the full range of strategic and tactical options as described in an approved FMP. Without an approved NEPA compliant FMP, suppression action must be taken.
- All agency units will utilize a decision making process that evaluates alternative management strategies against selected environmental, social, political, and economic criterion.

Prevention

Agencies will work together and with their partners and other affected groups and individuals to prevent unauthorized ignition of wildland fires.

Standardization

Agencies will use compatible planning processes, funding mechanisms, training and qualification requirements, operational procedures, values-to-be-protected methodologies, and public education programs for all fire management activities.

Interagency Coordination

Fire management planning, preparedness, prevention, suppression, fire use, restoration and rehabilitation, monitoring, research, and education will be conducted on an interagency basis with the involvement of cooperators and partners.

Communication and Education

Agencies will enhance knowledge and understanding of wildland fire management policies and practices through internal and external communication and education programs. These programs will be continuously improved through the timely and effective exchange of information among all affected agencies and organizations.

Agency Administrator and Employee Roles

Agency administrators will ensure that their employees are trained, certified, and made available to participate in the wildland fire program locally, regionally, and nationally as the situation demands. Employees with a valid Red Card, or other requested skills will support the wildland fire program as necessary. Agency administrators are responsible and accountable for making employees available.

Evaluation

Agencies will develop and implement a systematic method of evaluation to determine the effectiveness of projects through implementation of the 2001 Federal Fire Policy. The evaluation will ensure accountability, facilitate resolution of conflict, and identify resource shortages and priorities.

Economic Efficiency

Fire management programs and activities will be based on economic analyses that incorporate commodity, non-commodity, and social values.

Fire Cause Determination and Cost Recovery

Agency policy requires all wildland fires to be investigated to determine cause, origin, and responsibility. Agencies must pursue cost recovery, or document why cost recovery is not initiated, for all human-caused fires on public and/or other lands under protection agreement.

Employee Responsibility

All employees, cooperators, contractors, and volunteers who participate in wildland fire operations have the duty to treat one another with respect and to maintain a work environment free of harassment.

Hazing is considered a form of harassment. Hazing is defined as any action taken, or situation created intentionally, to produce mental or physical discomfort, embarrassment, or ridicule.

There is zero tolerance of misconduct, whether it is harassment, hazing, or any other inappropriate behavior. We must all take responsibility for creating and ensuring a healthy and safe work environment.

Every individual has a responsibility to report harassment or inappropriate behavior and take positive action to mitigate its effects.

Fire Management Objectives

The objectives of the wildland fire management program are to:

- Protect human life and property and natural/cultural resources both within and adjacent to agency administered lands.
- Minimize damages and maximize overall benefits of wildland fire within the framework of land use objectives and resources management plans.
- Manage the wildland fire program in accordance with congressional intent as expressed in the annual appropriations act and enabling legislation, and comply with applicable departmental manual and agency policies and procedures.
- Promote an interagency approach to managing fires on an ecosystem basis.
- Employ strategies to manage wildland fires that provide for firefighter and public safety, minimize cost and resource damage, and are consistent with values to be protected and management objectives.
- Restore and rehabilitate resources and improvements lost in or damaged by fire or suppression activities.
- Minimize, and where necessary mitigate, human-induced impacts to resources, natural processes, or improvements attributable to wildland fire activities.
- Promote public understanding of fire management programs and objectives.
- Organize a fire staff that can apply the highest standards of professional and technical expertise.
- Encourage research to advance understanding of fire behavior, effects, ecology, and management.
- Integrate fire management through all levels of the planning process.
- Prevent and investigate all unplanned human-caused fires.