

US FOREST SERVICE  
Fire and Aviation Management

WORK CAPACITY TESTS FOR WILDLAND FIRE QUALIFICATIONS –  
IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

**13 December 2007**

**Note to readers: This Guide impacts all Forest Service Regions including those who have implemented the Medical Standards Program and those who have not.**

# **WORK CAPACITY TESTS FOR WILDLAND FIRE QUALIFICATIONS**

## **FITNESS STANDARDS FOR WILDLAND FIRE POSITIONS**

The fitness standards for Incident Command System (ICS) positions are described in the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) “Wildland Fire Qualification Subsystem Guide” 310-1 and FSH 5109.17. The Guide and handbook describe four fitness categories; Arduous, Moderate, Light and None and assign one category as the standard for each position identified in the guide. Different agencies have different position qualification requirements; the minimum acceptable levels established for nationally mobile resources are those described in the PMS 310-1. The standards described in this Guide apply only to Forest Service employees and casual hires signed up by a Forest Service unit.

## **TESTING FOR FITNESS STANDARDS FOR WILDLAND FIRE POSITIONS**

The Work Capacity Tests (WCT) for Wildland Firefighters described in the “Work Capacity Test Administrator's Guide,” April 2003, NWCG Publication Management System PMS 307, NFES 1109, are the exclusive tests used by the Forest Service to determine whether a person meets the required fitness standard. The publication describes the PACK Test for Arduous positions, FIELD Test for Moderate positions and the WALK Test for Light positions. It also contains the instructions for conducting the tests. NONE means the position does not have a fitness standard, and does not require a Work Capacity Test of any kind.

The Work Capacity Test should not be administered to any employee at a higher fitness level than the most strenuous required for any fire position for which they are qualified. In other words, if the most strenuous fitness level of any position that an individual is qualified for has a Moderate fitness level, that person may not take the Work Capacity Test at the Arduous level.

## **ROLE OF THE INTERAGENCY MEDICAL STANDARDS PROGRAM (MSP)**

In areas where the Forest Service has implemented the Medical Standards Program, employees must attain “cleared” status through that program prior to taking the Work Capacity Test at the Arduous level. Regular Forest Service employees, including temporary/seasonal employees, who participate in the MSP are not subject to screening using the Health Screening Questionnaire and that form shall not be administered to them. This applies **ONLY** to Forest Service employees including seasonal/temporary employees attempting to maintain red card qualifications at the Arduous level. In an area where the Medical Standards Program has been implemented, casual employees over the age of 45

who are seeking Arduous qualifications must take the Annual Exam under the Medical Standards Program. Casual employees seeking Arduous qualifications who are under the age of 45 must complete the Health Screening Questionnaire. All other individuals – including agency employees and casual employees maintaining qualifications with Moderate or Light fitness requirements – must complete the HSQ as described below. All other individuals -- including agency employees and casual employees maintaining qualifications with Moderate or Light fitness requirements agency-wide, as well as employees seeking qualifications with Arduous fitness requirements in areas where the Medical Standards Program has not been implemented -- must complete the HSQ as described below.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WORK CAPACITY TESTS

The purpose for including the fitness element in the Wildland Fire Qualification Subsystem Guide (310-1) is to ensure persons assigned to fire activities do not become injured or ill because they do not have the fitness level required to perform the duties and responsibilities of the job. The degree of fitness required ranges significantly between the ARDUOUS and LIGHT levels. Positions with physical fitness levels of “NONE” do not require any type of physical fitness testing. The program to become physically fit before taking a WCT varies in intensity of work and the amount of time needed. The following describes a process beginning well before WCT's are conducted and carries through the actual testing. The steps are intended to make sure employees are not only fit enough to safely perform their fire duties but also to reduce the risk of injury or illness during fitness training or while taking a WCT. The elements of the implementation guide include:

1. Roles and Responsibilities for Health Screening and Work Capacity Testing
2. Determination of Employees' Required Fitness Testing Levels.
3. Informing Employees and Prospective Employees of fitness expectations and necessary preparation.
4. Health Assessment.
5. Medical Examinations.
6. Conducting Work Capacity Tests.
7. Work Capacity Test Oversight.

The "Associated Forms, Documents and Publications" section of this report includes materials needed to implement WCT. *Section 1 is located on page 12 and the documents are located at: [http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/wct/wct\\_index.html](http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/wct/wct_index.html)*

# 1. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR HEALTH SCREENING AND WORK CAPACITY TESTING

## A. Employee

Employees are responsible for maintaining fitness levels sufficient to withstand the rigors of wildland firefighting. Employees should understand how the Health Screening Questionnaire (HSQ) process works and how the Work Capacity Test is administered. They should also know what fitness level is required for the ICS positions for which they are attempting to qualify, and how to properly train in preparation for taking the WCT. It is an employee responsibility to schedule and attend a physical examination, should one be required. Employees are in pay status during physical examinations.

## B. Fire Program Manager

Fire Program Managers need to be able to understand the processes involved in Health Screening Questionnaire completion and Work Capacity Testing. Fire Program Managers are responsible for explaining to employees what will be required of them in completing the HSQ and the WCT. They also must provide employees with appropriate WCT preparation information to ensure all employees are adequately prepared to take the WCT. Adequate time must also be provided to employees for appropriate physical conditioning. Fire Program Managers are also responsible for determining the appropriate fitness level for employees who will be taking the WCT and for administering the WCT. Fire Program Managers are responsible for informing employees of payment and scheduling procedures for physical examinations, if needed.

## C. Unit HSQ Coordinator

The Unit HSQ Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that HSQ's are properly completed and processed at the unit level for all individuals, including prospective casual hires (ADs). A total of two (2) HSQ Coordinators – a primary and an alternate – are permitted on each Forest, Station or equivalent to provide continuous service. HSQ Coordinators must complete a “Confidentiality Agreement for Work with Medical Records” prior to administering this program; the purpose of this is to ensure the confidentiality of employees' personal medical information. The signed Confidentiality Agreements are to be maintained at the local unit level and a copy faxed to ASC-HCM at 505-563-9991 or as otherwise instructed. An annual reminder of the medical records confidentiality requirements and the importance of strict adherence thereto will be provided to each HSQ Coordinator, normally by an email originating from the ASC and/or Fire Management through Regions, Stations or equivalent.

If an issue or concern with the process arises at any time during the completion of the HSQ form or associated processes, employees should be referred to the Unit HSQ

Coordinators. The Unit HSQ Coordinator does not have a Human Resources role; their job is to process the HSQ forms, make determinations based on established criteria, and ensure that employees move through the process.

Upon receiving completed HSQ forms from employees, the Unit HSQ Coordinator reviews completed HSQ forms and makes an initial determination based upon the criteria established. Based upon responses to HSQ questions, an employee can either proceed with physical fitness training and Work Capacity Testing or be referred for a physical exam. The Unit HSQ Coordinator is also responsible for ensuring that Informed Consent forms are also on file for all employees who will be taking a Work Capacity Test.

If the employees' responses on the HSQ form indicate that they may proceed without physical examination, then the HSQ Coordinator must provide timely notification to the employee (in writing) that he/she may proceed with fitness training. Those required to pass the WCT normally will be informed at least four (4) weeks prior to the scheduled test date, to allow time for fitness training, as needed.

If the employees' responses on the HSQ form indicate a need for physical examination, then HSQ Coordinator provides the employee the standard physician's letter and SF-78 for the appropriate fitness level (arduous, moderate, light). This letter shall include ASC address for mailing the completed SF-78 and a statement regarding how the local unit will pay for the examination. The HSQ Coordinator will immediately fax a copy of the completed HSQ to ASC w/ cover sheet (marked "CONFIDENTIAL Medical Information") including e-mail address, name/unit, phone number of coordinator and employee. The confidential ASC-HCM fax numbers are 505-563-9991 and 9992. NOTE: Upon implementation of e-FAX, HSQ coordinators will be notified of the new fax numbers.

All original completed HSQ forms for all employees (both those who required physical examination and those who did not) should be mailed to ASC on a quarterly basis. Prior to mailing these forms to ASC, they must be kept in a secure, locked location with limited public access in order to safeguard confidential medical information. Completed HSQ forms for casual (AD) employees should not be sent to ASC, but rather are to be filed in a secure manner at the local level with the employee's other hiring documents. When no longer needed (e.g., one year after WCT test date), all confidential medical documents for ADs are to be destroyed by shredding.

#### D. Physician

Conducts examination, completes SF-78 form and mails to ASC-HCM Attn: HSQ-Medical Form.

## E. Human Resources – Albuquerque Service Center

### i. Staffing

When a completed SF-78 form is received at ASC, the form will be examined to determine if the physician has indicated that the employee should proceed with fitness training and Work Capacity Testing or not. If a physician expresses a need for additional specialized testing such as a chest x-ray, resting EKG or urinalysis, the doctor will request authorization for this through ASC Staffing. [inconsistency fixed. –gs] For employees with wildland firefighting duties in their position descriptions, a 12-lead EKG stress test will be paid for if indicated by a doctor in consultation with ASC Staffing prior to conducting the test. If the physician has indicated that the person can proceed, ASC provides information to the Unit HSQ Coordinator and the employee via e-mail that employee is cleared to participate in a physical fitness program. It is imperative that this information be provided to the HSQ coordinator and employee in a timely manner.

If the physician has indicated on the SF-78 that an employee should not be allowed to begin physical training to take the Work Capacity Test, ASC shall notify the employee. This notification will include a letter and a copy of the SF-78. If the employee is in a primary firefighter position, ASC Staffing will also notify the supervisor so that work assignment options can be explored. Staffing also will forward pertinent information to ASC Employee Relations, when appropriate.

HSQs and SF-78s are medical forms; they are to be filed in an official Employee Medical Folder and treated as “confidential”.

### ii. Employee Relations

Employee Relations will review each situation on a case-by-case basis; if additional action is needed, the ER Specialist will contact the supervisor to determine further action. If ER action is initiated, employees will be informed in writing of their grievance or appeal rights, as appropriate.

## 2. DETERMINATION OF EMPLOYEES' ROLES IN FIRE PROGRAM

Any employee involved with or wanting to be involved with fire management activities will work with their local Fire Program Manager to determine appropriate duties considering factors such as medical condition, physical condition and desire to achieve and maintain fitness levels. Targeted duties must be consistent with these considerations. The

targeted duties should be discussed annually prior to scheduling training and prior to beginning fitness training in preparation for work capacity tests. Work Capacity tests are effective for one year (12 months) from the time passed.

An employee could be required to re-take a Work Capacity Test before the 12 Months has expired if:

- 1) A management official through personal observation or direct knowledge determines that an employee's health and/or fitness level has changed, or
- 2) A medical provider presents evidence that an employee can no longer perform at the appropriate fitness level for the qualified position, or
- 3) An employee discloses a significant change in their medical condition or history.

### **3. INFORMING EMPLOYEES AND PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYEES OF FITNESS EXPECTATIONS**

All persons expected to perform fire duties that require a WCT must be informed of the requirement in a timely manner. They must also be provided appropriate information on how to adequately prepare for the WCT and maintain fitness year-round. Employees required to pass the WCT normally will be informed at least four (4) weeks prior to the scheduled test date, to allow time for fitness training, as needed; for prospective employees, the recruitment notice will provide information relating to the WCT and will serve as the notice. A Health Screening Questionnaire will be provided at that time to each current and prospective employee to perform a personal assessment with instructions for its use and directions on where to return the form. Individuals required to obtain further medical evaluation will be provided the needed information. The SF-78 form is discussed below.

#### **Employees in Fire Positions**

Expectations and requirements for fire duties should be explained during pre-fire season meetings with the Fire Program Manager. The applicable WCT will be identified and the employee will be informed of the test date to allow time for fitness training prior to the test. Information related to fitness training, training for the WCT, and the type of WCT to be taken shall be made available to the employee. Employees are encouraged to maintain high fitness levels year-round through a personal fitness program such as FireFit (see <http://www.nifc.gov/FireFit/index.htm>) and “Fitness and Work Capacity – 3<sup>rd</sup> edition”.

Each individual is responsible for their own physical condition and health. No amount of health screening or medical examination can absolutely ensure an individual's safety during a work capacity test or fire management activities. If employees are uncertain about the condition of their health, have been inactive, or are seriously under or overweight, they

should consult their personal physician before beginning physical conditioning, taking a WCT, or engaging in fire management activities.

### **Prospective Employees (new hires and rehire eligibles) Hired in Fire Positions**

Expectations of fitness requirements will be explained in the recruitment notice. The recruitment notice will include information about the work to be performed, the WCT to be taken, and how to prepare for the WCT.

The pre-employment package will include the HSQ form, the approximate date of the WCT and an explanation of the consequences of not passing the WCT. Employment is contingent upon the return of the completed HSQ form, review of the form and a medical provider's approval, if required, to begin physical training or to take the WCT.

### **Employees Hired in Non-Fire Positions**

If the employee is interested and will be available for fire assignments but fire duties are not included in their position description they will follow the same guidelines as those for employees in fire positions.

### **Casual Hire (AD) Employees**

The announcement of intent to hire casual employees should include information about the type of work to be performed, including the Work Capacity Test and how to prepare for it. An HSQ form will be given to casual hire employees prior to taking any level of the WCT. If the individual does not meet the established criteria in answering questions on the HSQ form, they will not be allowed to take the WCT without a release from a medical provider. If the position is of a critical nature and the Forest Service determines the need to proceed with the hiring, the government may pay for medical screening or a medical exam. Payment for such a medical exam from WFSU funds by the Forest Service is consistent with direction. However, the casual should not be in a hired status during the exam. The examination cost should be charged to the funding code for AD training assigned to the unit by the National Fire Finance Office. The HSQ and any additional medical information should be filed with the AD hiring packet and secured as per agency regulation. HSQ information for casual employees should be maintained at the local unit and not sent to ASC.

Use WFSU for the salary costs of casual (AD) firefighters during fitness testing. Use WFPR for the costs of all personnel providing fitness testing for casual (AD) firefighters.

### **Retesting if the WCT is not passed**

The WCT can be completed more than once per year under certain conditions, as described

below. Any employee who sustains an injury during the test, and is subsequently seen and certified as injured by a qualified medical provider (physician, physician assistant, nurse practitioner), will not have that WCT counted as one of their attempts. Once released for full duty, the employee will be given sufficient time, based on the recommendation of the medical provider, to prepare for retesting. However, the employee will only be allowed up to four (4) weeks for test preparation.

For employees who fail their initial test but are not injured, subsequent retesting will take place a minimum of forty-eight (48) hours from the time the failed WCT was administered. If employees fail to pass the WCT, the following are applicable:

- a. Temporary employees and prospective casual hires required to pass a WCT as a condition of employment will be provided one opportunity to pass the required test. A second chance may be provided at the discretion of management.
- b. Permanent employees required to pass a WCT for duties associated with their positions will be provided three chances to pass the required test before action is initiated to address their fitness limitations.
- c. Permanent and temporary employees who do not perform fire assignments as a recurring part of their position but who are authorized to perform such duties, may be retested as many times as management deems appropriate.

There are several sources of information about fitness and WCT available to provide to personnel required to pass one of the WCTs. All individuals required to take a WCT will receive a copy of the "Work Capacity Test" brochure (April 2003) from the Fire Program Manager. This brochure is posted on the Internet at [http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/wct/2002/brochure\\_2002.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/wct/2002/brochure_2002.pdf)

The publication Fitness and Work Capacity, 3rd edition, (NFES - 1596) is for optional use. It contains a great deal of information about fitness and work capacity, health, safety and performance and fit-to-work topics.

The FireFit Program is also available for employees wishing to maintain or improve their fitness levels year-round. This program can be found at the following URL: <http://www.nifc.gov/FireFit/index.htm>

### **3. HEALTH ASSESSMENT**

A Health Screening Questionnaire (FS-5100-31/OMB 0596-0164, as revised) is used for self-screening of current and prospective employees involved with fire management activities. It is based on a questionnaire for cardiovascular screening developed by a medical doctor with an Occupational Health specialty. It is based on a questionnaire

developed by a medical doctor with an Occupational Health Specialty. The questionnaire is a single page document to be completed by the individual. Both the HSQ and the SF 78 forms are considered confidential medical records that must be safeguarded from unauthorized access or release. As with any medical record, these documents are to be seen only by the employee and those with a job-related “need-to-know.”

#### **4. MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS**

In areas where the Medical Standards Program has not been implemented, the Forest Service will pay for completion of the SF-78 form and associated examinations when required. Payment for additional medical tests is limited to chest x-ray, a resting EKG, and a urinalysis. For employees with wildland firefighting duties in their position descriptions, a 12-lead EKG stress test will be paid for if indicated by a doctor in consultation with ASC Staffing prior to conducting the test.

When medical examinations are ordered, the Forest Service will provide instructions to the examining physician. Copies of the SF - 78, Certificate of Medical Examination (with Section A and B completed) for each WCT level are posted on the web at: [http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/wct/wct\\_index.html](http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/wct/wct_index.html) along with all the required “Forms, Documents and Publications” as listed in section 1. The instructions must include the name of the person to be examined, a description of the WCT, what medical factors are to be evaluated, and directions for returning the examination information.

Pre-employment medical examinations that evaluate the same functional requirements and environmental factors as those evaluated by a medical examination for a WCT may be substituted.

#### **5. CONDUCTING WORK CAPACITY TESTS**

The publication, “Work Capacity Tests for Wildland Firefighters, Test Administrator’s Guide,” April 2003, PMS 307, NFES 1109, is the Forest Service standard for conducting the WCT. The required standard of testing is once every 12 months. However, in the event the employees’ health changes, management may require the employee to retest within the 12-month period, using the WCT test criteria.

The appropriate forms and publications related to Work Capacity Test administration are listed in Section 1 of this document. All documents are listed on the web at: [http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/wct/wct\\_index.html](http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/wct/wct_index.html)

Each WCT must be conducted by a Certified WCT Administrator. Roles and responsibilities for that position can be found in the “Work Capacity Tests for Wildland Firefighters: Test Administrator’s Guide”. Guidelines for certification can be found in appendix A.

## **Work Capacity Test Documentation-**

Each WCT session will be documented using the following:

### **“Job Hazard Analysis”**

A Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) was done for the general activity of Work Capacity Testing and mitigations identified have been incorporated into the instructions. A copy is included in the Forms, Documents and Publications section of this package. A unique JHA will be developed to address local conditions. The JHA will be discussed with the participants prior to taking the work capacity tests.

### **"Work Capacity Administration Report"**

The form will be completed each time a WCT is conducted to document the session, location, test administrator, personnel tested, the test results and pertinent comments. Any injuries will be documented in the pass column and described in the comment section of this form. Only those individuals cleared to take the WCT via completion of the Health Screening Questionnaire process will be allowed to take a test.

Employees and supervisors are expected to document in SHIPS any injuries related to the WCT.

### **“Work Capacity Test: Informed Consent” form**

Each person participating in a WCT must sign a “Work Capacity Test: Informed Consent” form provided by the test administrator or HSQ Coordinator prior to taking the test. The completed form will be filed at the local level by the Unit HSQ Coordinator.

### **"Work Capacity Test Record"**

The form will be completed for each test participant. A completed copy will be provided to each employee's unit Fire Program Manager for fire qualifications records and for the employee's official personnel record and a copy retained for the test administrator's record.

## **6. WORK CAPACITY TEST OVERSIGHT**

The Regional Fire Director (or equivalent) is responsible for oversight of WCT within their units to ensure compliance with this Implementation Guide.

## **SECTION 1: “ASSOCIATED FORMS, DOCUMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS”**

### **(Associated Forms, Documents and Publications Pertinent to Implementing Work Capacity Tests)**

**Forms: [http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/wct/wct\\_index.html](http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/wct/wct_index.html)**

- \* Health Screening Questionnaire (HSQ) - (FS-5100-31 (rev 8/2006) / OMB 0596-0164)
- \* Work Capacity Test: Informed Consent
- \* Work Capacity Test Administration Report
- \* Work Capacity Test Record
- \* SF-78 (Arduous, Moderate, Light)
- \* Job Hazard Analysis for Work Capacity Tests
- \* Confidentiality Agreement for Work with Medical Records

#### **Publications:**

- \* “Fitness and Work Capacity 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition” (NFES 1596)
- \* “Work Capacity Test” brochure (January 2002)
- \* “Work Capacity Tests for Wildland Firefighters” (9851-2810)
- \* “Work Capacity Test Administrator’s Guide” April 2003 (NFES 1109)

## **APPENDIX A: TEST ADMINISTRATOR CERTIFICATION PROCESS**

1. **Pre-work-** \*Administrator candidates are required to study:

"Work Capacity Test" brochure

"Fitness and Work Capacity" (NFES 1596)

"Work Capacity Tests for Wildland Firefighters, Test Administrator's Guide"  
(9851-2810-MTDC)

"Work Capacity Test Implementation Guide, January 2004" (this package)

"Work Capacity Test Questions and Answers, January 2004"

2. **Classroom Interaction-**

The candidates are required to have a thorough discussion with the Fire Program Manager or designee to ensure understanding of the pre-work materials and additional information specific to the local area, as determined by the unit Fire Program Manager.

3. **Certification of Test Administrators-**

Following completion of the classroom interaction the Fire Program Manager will certify the individuals chosen to administer WCT.

4. **Documentation-**

The names of persons certified to administer WCT will be filed in the Red Card system file and a notice of certification will be filed in each WCT Administrator's personnel folder.

5. **Re-certification-**

Administrators will be re-certified every 3 years or when significant changes are made in the WCT or procedures related to the tests.