

**Director's Remarks
S-620 Area Command
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Opening Remarks

It's an honor for me to be here today and talk to you as you start your Area Command training. You've all been around for sometime—maybe not as long as I, but you are experienced enough to understand that by completing this training, you are entering the arena of added responsibility and enhanced complexity in incident management. If you don't know now, by the end of your training, you will fully understand the role and responsibilities of area command. Not unlike what I tell the folks who attend S-520, you are the “best of the best,” and with that title comes a high level of responsibility and the expectation that you will perform your duties, in **support** of those folks who need your help, with the highest level of professionalism and integrity.

The Future of the Area Command Concept

The future of the area command concept rests on your performance over the next few years. When you are called upon, the incident is complex and has risen to the level of “national significance.” At that point, people are watching you, what you do, and how you do it. Some say there is a good case for not continuing the role of area command as it is right now; the Department of Homeland Security NIMS does not include area command. It is incumbent upon you to fulfill the role of area command in a manner in which folks are supportive of the continued existence of area command. I don't have to tell any of you what a tremendous opportunity and privilege it is for you to attend this class and represent your respective agencies when called upon; it's your responsibility to do them proud.

Emerging Issues in Fire Management today

I've been asked to talk to you about the new, emerging issues in fire management today. This is an exciting time!

2009 QFR

The second Quadrennial Fire Review was published in January which reaffirms some of the things we've been seeing over the past years, such as:

- The effects of climate change will continue to result in greater probability of longer and bigger fire seasons in more regions of the nation.
- Cumulative drought effects will further stress fuels accumulations. The current drought cycle is expected to last for another 20 to 25 years.
- There will be continued wildfire risk in the WUI despite greater public awareness and broader involvement of communities.
- Emergency response demands will escalate.
- Fire agency budget resources will be strained by increased demands and rising costs during a period where government budget revenues will be very tight or failing.

So what does that mean for you as members of an area command team—beside the fact that there will be a lot of work for all of us? It means that we:

- Must be prepared to cope with the potential for a 10 to 12 million annual wildfire acres range over the next five years.
- Drought effects in the Southeast, Southwest, and West will make these areas especially vulnerable in terms of fire risk.
- Overall shifts in population and increasing development of former timberland holdings will drive more seasonal recreation and full-time residency in areas adjacent to public lands—increasing the likelihood of human caused ignitions. Therefore, efforts to promote fire prevention, adapt community wildfire protection plans, promote hazardous fuels treatments, and fire education will continue to be imperative.
- The growing impacts of global warming and extreme climatic change will also be likely to increase the frequency and devastation of other

natural disasters where massive government emergency response will be required. Fire management must prepare and expect to be called on to play an increasing major role.

- Fire suppression costs have already outstripped budgeted costs for the past five consecutive years. Many states are seeing their reserve funds overwhelmed when they have significant fires. Coupled with the rising pressure to find ways to control wildfire costs, budget stress at all levels is likely to further intensify and impact the way we all do our jobs.

Fire management on every level MUST expand its thinking beyond continuous reinforcement of safety as a function and operational concern. Safety and risk management must be strengthened and more systemically incorporated into fire planning, developing safety metrics on a level equal with post-fire resource impacts and productivity.

We must move beyond appropriate management response to strategic management response that creates a framework for a multi-phased approach to incident management. Elements within SMR are:

- Ensure proactive wildland fire decisions with greater transparency and accountability;
- Recalibrating fire planning; and
- Establishing more robust fire outcome metrics.

Organizationally, SMR would realign incident management team structures to:

- Transform the ability to respond;
- Reposition more rapidly;
- Be more scalable to situations; and
- Place fire management response in line with the NRF.

Bringing fire management response to greater alignment with NRF leads to a core strategy for rebalancing emergency response within fire management. Make no mistake, federal agencies will always maintain land stewardship and protection responsibilities as our primary objective, but a more interactive, robust

approach enabling fire agencies to work more effectively with FEMA and state and local community emergency response forces may be needed. Fire management must build beyond our strong training and technical assistance roles in national incident management—those that are well-established, and promote stronger interplay and planning for emergency response, in effect extending the reach of emergency response through a “total force concept.”

One of the final strategies of the QFR outlines directions for creating new content, mediums, and networks for information sharing and public education. While there are numerous applications out there, the QFR details several strategy elements to include the “rethinking” of public information. Routinely, there has not been a defined role for public information with area command. This might be the time to “re-think” information’s role in area command.

Fire management must continue to recognize that its capability to manage in the highly dynamic future environment rests on its capacity and resolve to operate as a truly integrated interagency organization, working seamlessly across jurisdictional and organizational boundaries, leveraging the existing capabilities of partners, contractors and the public to help accomplish our mission.

Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy

On February 13, the Fire Executive Council approved new guidance for the implementation of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy. Although revised guidance changes some of the elements of our management wildland fire, any management response on federal land will remain consistent with the respective land/resource management plan. The objective for initial actions on human-caused fires stays the same—to suppress the fire at the lowest cost and with the fewest negative consequences to firefighter and public safety. Some terminology has changed. Wildland fire is a general term describing any non-structure fire that occurs in the wildland, and there are now two distinct types of fire--not three:

1. **Wildfires** are any planned or unplanned ignitions that are declared wildfires. The wildfire term is now applied to all unplanned ignitions including those previously termed "wildland fire use."
2. **Prescribed fires** are planned ignitions.

A wildland fire may be concurrently managed for one or more objectives and those objectives can change as the fire spreads across the landscape, encounters new fuels, weather, social, and governmental conditions. There has **always** been a need for us to work collaborative with our federal, state, local and tribal partners and public and nongovernmental organizations in the management of wildland fires; what these revised guidance do is reinforce the need for us to continue to do so.

The 0.25% Mission

Lastly, I'd like to touch on what's called, *The 0.25% Mission*. The strategy for FY 2009 is focused on improving the decisions that Agency Administrators and Incident Commanders make regarding a small percentage (.25%) of the largest fires—thereby, called the 0.25% mission. The strategy aims to produce safe outcomes, improved results on the land, a good investment of tax dollars, and good relationships with stakeholders. The objectives of the strategy are:

- (1) Use the best science;
- (2) Prepare to engage the .25% fires before they ignite;
- (3) Provide effective management of .25% incidents;
- (4) Measure success via credible science based performance measures;
- (5) Manage agency suppression funds in an effective manner; and
- (6) Continually improve through learning from peer based after action reviews for all .25% category fires.

The strategy has the following six elements:

- (1) Use NIMO teams to prepare the 30 National Forests that are predisposed to large challenging fires;
- (2) Develop and implement an effective risk management and decision making protocol that increases the probability of success;

- (3) Use the WFDSS science based decision support tools within the context of the protocol;
- (4) Ensure that Agency Administrators are prepared to make successful decisions using the protocol;
- (5) Build capacity of NIMO teams to facilitate and successfully manage assigned .25% category fires; and
- (6) Structure large scale experiment that, via monitoring the results, will demonstrate success or failure of this strategy.

As I look across the room, about half of you are part of one of the four NIMO teams and will have an integral role in the success of this program.

Conclusion

As I conclude my remarks today, I want to reiterate what I said at the earlier, it's an exciting time to be involved in incident management! Good luck as you embark on the challenges associated with your role in area command.

--Tom Harbour, Director
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