9 – Initial Attack

Policy

The objective of initial attack fire suppression is to safely and efficiently suppress fires in conformance with existing policy and procedures, consistent with approved Fire Management Plan (FMP).

All fire management activities will be based on firefighter and public safety, cost effectiveness, and values to be protected consistent with resource objectives, by using the full range of strategic and tactical options as described in an approved, NEPA compliant FMP.

In areas where an approved FMP exists, naturally ignited fires may be managed to benefit resource values in accordance with the preplanned conditions and objectives outlined in a Wildland Fire Implementation Plan (WFIP).

It is recommended that all initial attack incident commanders complete basic training in wildland fire cause determination.

BLM – All initial attack incident commanders must have completed basic training in wildland fire cause determination.

Local units will establish standard response times for all initial attack resources.

All personnel arriving at an incident must receive a briefing from the Incident Commander (IC), or delegate, prior to initiating any actions on the incident. Incoming ICs must place a priority on providing briefings to resources already on the scene. The principles of LCES must be implemented prior to the initiation of any actions.

USFS – All employees will adhere to the Chief's Memo of Direction for the *Thirtymile Action and Implementation Plan* as stated in the 5100 memos dated January 11, 2002 and April 16, 2002.

Initial Attack Dispatch

Standard Operating Procedures

Units with dispatching responsibility, in conjunction with their cooperators, will ensure dispatch standard operating procedures (SOPs) are developed. Agency administrators will ensure that an annual review verifies that required elements are updated and in place, and that written, approved procedures are fully implemented and adhered to during dispatching operations. See *Preparedness Review Guide* for specific information on review procedures. (www.fire.blm.gov/standards/precont.htm)

There are variations in the required elements for dispatch SOPs due to many factors (activity level/complexities, interagency coordination, all-risk incidents, HazMat). However, the following topics shall be identified (at a minimum) in a dispatch center's SOP. The elements identified under the topics are examples of what should be covered.

Additional guidance can be obtained by reviewing local unit fire management reference guides.

Organization: Chain-of-command/table of organization for local agencies and cooperators; notification process/procedures; roles/responsibilities, etc.

Dispatch Operations:
- General information
- Dispatcher role and responsibilities
- Dispatcher training and qualifications
- Procedures for dispatch of resources off unit

Daily Duties:
- Check-in/out of administrative/fire personnel
- Intelligence
- Weather/briefings
- Verify initial attack response levels
- Status suppression resources
- Preparedness level establishment and verification

Initial Attack Response Plan: (Synonymous terminology—preplanned dispatch plans, run-cards, dispatch procedures.) General information relating to the plan; procedures for identifying preparedness levels; notification to suppression forces and management of new fire starts or ongoing fire activity; modification/update procedures for the plan; procedures to follow when activity exceeds the initial attack plan, etc.

Emergency Operations (Fire/Non-fire):
- Notification of a fire report
- Land status verification
- IA response plan activation
- Agency and area notification
- Move-up and cover procedures
- Call-back procedures
- Evacuation of fire area
- Closing public/private roads
- Ordering additional personnel, equipment, aircraft
- Fire weather watch and red flag warning notification
- Temporary flight restrictions (TFR)
- Agency duty officers (roles and responsibilities)
- Aircraft pre-accident plan
- Utility company notification (power and gas)
- Law enforcement dispatching procedures/requirements
- HazMat/spill response notification procedures
- Local government requesting all-risk assistance
- Search and rescue
- Identify the incident commander

Local Agreements: Copies of all interagency or inter-district agreements and associated annual operating plans that govern the use of fire management resources, including maps delineating areas of responsibility for fire suppression coverage.

Communications: Procedures for assigning/managing local radio frequencies; procedures for obtaining additional frequencies; a map of repeater sites/frequencies; instructions for using local dispatch radio consoles, phones, computers, fax machines, paging systems, etc.

Weather: Processing of weather observations via Weather Information Management System (WIMS); daily posting and briefing procedures; broadcasts of fire weather forecasts to local fire suppression personnel; procedures for processing spot weather forecast requests and disseminating spot forecasts to the field; procedures for immediate notification to fire suppression personnel of Fire Weather Watches and Red Flag Warnings.

Fire Danger: Remain aware of locally significant fire danger indices and record those values daily; update and post monthly the seasonal trends of those value versus average.

Information to be Provided by Dispatch for Suppression/Support: Resource availability/shortages; radio frequencies to be used; burning conditions/fuel types; weather forecast updates; local fire activity; agency policies, etc. For Management: fire activity; incident updates; weather updates; resource status.

Time frames and frequencies/locations for daily briefings must be clearly specified in the local dispatch SOP. A method should also be identified for documenting briefings (time given, content of briefing, and person(s) conducting and receiving briefing).

Preparedness Levels: General information relating to the local preparedness plan; procedures for identifying level; notification to management; dispatching roles and responsibilities at each preparedness level, etc.

Specific triggers should be incorporated into preparedness plans that cause the preparedness level to move up or down. These triggers could be related to number/size of fires, amount and type of resources available/committed, regional/national fire situation, condition of local fuels, observed fire behavior, and human-caused risk or predicted lightning activity level, etc. Specific actions should also be tied to each preparedness level, such as prepositioning of suppression resources (crews, engines, airtankers, smokejumpers, etc.), the activation of local Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC) groups, making contact with other agencies, and hiring of call when needed (CWN) aircraft, emergency equipment rental agreements (EERA), or administratively determined (AD) pay plan crews.

Aviation: Ordering/scheduling requirements and procedures; special use airspace; special use mission requirements; incident/accident reporting and documentation procedures; flight management/tracking procedures.

Dispatch Center Staffing Plan: Call-out procedures for additional personnel in emergency situations; designation of duty officer for dispatch center; shift limitations and day off/R&R policy; EFF hiring, etc.

Expanded Dispatch Plan: Indicators for considering establishment of expanded dispatch; recommended organization and points of contact; overhead positions to order; location/facilities; equipment/supplies; support needs; procurement or buying unit team considerations; service and supply plan, etc.

Administrative Items: Funding, travel, time sheets, fire reports, etc.

Accident/Incident: Criteria/definitions; agency notification and documentation requirements; procedures for mobilization of critical incident stress debriefing teams, etc.

Medical Plan: Activation/evacuation information; medical facility locations and phone numbers; air and ground transport (Medivac) capability; burn center information, etc.

Media Plan: General procedures; notification requirements to agency external affairs personnel; routing for media calls.

Fire Sizeup

At the earliest opportunity after arrival on an incident, the initial attack incident commander will, at a minimum, relay the information in **Appendix M** to the agency dispatch, and continue to keep the dispatcher informed of any significant changes and progress on the fire.

USFS – A complexity analysis must be completed and documented on all fires. This can be found in the *Incident Response Pocket Guide*.

Fire Cause Determination Checklist

Take investigation materials to incident.

- Make notes of all your actions and findings including:
  - ► Time fire was reported.
  - ► Name and identification of reporting party.
  - ► In route observations – people and vehicles.
  - ► Name and identification of persons or vehicles in vicinity of fire origin.
  - ► Record the weather.
- Locate and protect the fire point of origin. (Use a GPS to record lat./long. or UTM, depending on local policy.)
- Search fire origin area for physical evidence of fire cause.
- Protect evidence. Do not remove unless necessary to prevent destruction.
- Make sketches of origin area using accurate measurements in relation to locations of all evidence.
- Take photographs from all angles (include long and medium distance, as well as close-up views) of fire origin area and important evidence. Document in photo evidence log.
- Turn over all notes, information, and physical evidence to the responsible law enforcement representative, or make your notes part of the official fire record.

For additional information on Fire Cause Determination procedures, see Chapter 13, Reviews and Investigations.

Operational Briefings

Procedures and Guidelines

It is agency policy for the IC, or their delegate, to brief all personnel who arrive at an incident before assignment.

If aerially delivered firefighters cannot be briefed prior to departure from base, the receiving dispatch office will provide a briefing to the supervisor by radio. In all cases, aerially delivered firefighters will be briefed prior to starting work. The IC or their delegate will document all Operational Briefings.

The Operational Briefing Checklist found in **Appendix D** and the *IRPG*, contains the minimum items required to brief all incoming crews, personnel, or resources. Units are encouraged to expand the minimum briefing, as appropriate, to ensure that safety and efficiency are addressed.

Spot Weather Forecast

Spot weather forecasts must be requested for fires that exhibit extreme fire behavior, exceed initial attack, or are located in areas where Red Flag Warnings have been issued. Spot weather forecasts may be requested at any time. (See the spot weather forecast form in **Appendix N**.)

Strategy & Tactics

Determining appropriate initial attack strategies and tactics must be based on the primary incident and management objective of providing for firefighter and public safety. Other factors, such as fire current and predicted fire behavior, values to be protected, and available operational resources will dictate appropriate strategies and tactics.

When selecting and implementing strategy and tactics always consider: objectives, the type and number of resources available, their condition (work/rest), current and predicated fire behavior and weather conditions.

Risk Management/LCES: Identification and mitigation of risk must be considered in all strategic and tactical planning prior to initiation of action. Use of the Risk Management Process is mandatory. Continual reevaluation of the Risk Management/LCES process is essential.

Fire Suppression Interpretations from Flame Length	
Flame Length	**Interpretations**
Less than 4'	Fires can generally be attacked at the head or flanks by firefighters using hand tools. Handline should hold fire.
4' to 8'	Fires are too intense for direct attack on the head with hand tools. Handline cannot be relied on to hold the fire. Bulldozers, engines, and retardant crops can be effective.
8' to 11'	Fires may present serious control problems: torching, crowning, and spotting. Control efforts at the head will probably be ineffective.
Over 11'	Crowning, spotting, and major fire runs are probably. Control efforts at the head of the fire are ineffective.

Direct Attack: This strategy is conducted directly on the flaming edge of the fire. Direct attack must start with an anchor point.

Direct Attack	
Advantages	**Disadvantages**
Minimal area is burned. No additional area is intentionally burned.	Firefighters can be hampered by heat, smoke, and flames.
It's the safest place to work; firefighters can usually escape into the burn area.	Control lines can be very long and irregular, because the line follows edge of fire.
The possibility of the fire moving into the crowns of trees or brush.	Burning material can easily spread across mid-slope lines.
The uncertainties of burning out or backfiring can be reduced/eliminated.	May not be able to use natural or existing barriers.
Full advantage is taken of burn out areas.	Usually more mop-up and patrol.

Indirect Attack: This strategy is used when a direct attack is not possible or practical. The use of natural barriers, roads, fuel type changes, etc. helps to establish control lines as part of burn out or backfiring operations. Effective strategy when fire behavior is intense and/or fire fighting resources are scarce. Indirect attack must start with an anchor point.

Indirect Attack	
Advantages	**Disadvantages**
The line can be located along favorable topography.	More land will be burned.
Natural or existing barriers can be used.	Must be able to trade time and space to allow line to be constructed.
Firefighters may not have to work in smoke and heat.	Firefighters may be placed in more danger because they are more distant from the fire and can't observe it.
Allows line to be constructed in lighter fuels.	There may be some dangers related to burning out or back firing.
May be less danger of slopovers.	Fire may cross line before it is fired.
Can cut fireline across pockets and fingers.	Burning out may leave unburned islands of fuel.
Usually shorter and straighter line.	May not be able to use line already built.

Hotspotting: Hotspotting as a tactic is used to hold the active areas on a fire's edge long enough to allow line construction operations to encompass the area. Emphasis must be placed on the use of viable anchor points, escape routes and safety zones to maintain LCES.

Cold Trailing: Cold trailing as a tactic means the firefighters are working along a partially dead line. They are inspecting the black line for heat, constructing line where needed, and mopping up hotspots. Cold trailing is used to reduce unnecessary disturbance to the environment.

Mopup: Mopup as a tactic is to extinguish burning material that may cause a fire to spread beyond the control lines.

Mopping Up a Fire	
Priorities	**Guidelines**
Start work on each portion of line as soon as possible.	Start with the most dangerous line first. Work from the fireline toward the center of the fire. Small fires are totally extinguished. On larger fires, mopup a minimum of 100 feet, or to such a distance that nothing will blow, roll, or spot across the line.
Secure and extinguish burning materials.	Arrange burning fuels so they cannot roll across the line. Spread smoldering fuels and apply water so they will cool. Scatter fuels away from the line.
Deal with special hazards inside the line.	Fall snags; extinguish logs and stumps. If you can't fall the snag, clear around the base, so that burning material will not fall into flammable fuels.
Deal with special hazards outside the line.	Move slash back, away from the fireline. Fall snags and cover with dirt. If stumps are close to the line, cover them with dirt.
Reinforce the fireline.	Widen and clean the fireline. Reinforce any undercut line. Burn out or cold trail islands. Dig out roots that cross under the fireline. Feel for hot material along the fireline.
Check for spot fires.	Constantly check for spot fires, especially downwind from the fireline. Check heavier fuels (logs, snags, slash, etc.) for smoldering material.

For additional information on strategic and tactical guidelines and principles, see the *NWCG Fireline Handbook (PMS 410-1, NFES 0065), Chapter 1, Initial Attack* and *Chapter 5, Safety,* and the *Incident Response Pocket Guide (PMS-461, NFES 1077).*

Manager's After Action Review

Standards

The "Managers Supplement for After Action Review" can be found in **Appendix O.** It emphasizes the factors that are critical for ensuring safe and efficient wildland fire suppression, and provides examples for managers to use in their review of incident operations and incident commanders.