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Chapter 07

Interagency Coordination & Cooperation

Introduction

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.

Successful implementation of any fire management program is dependent on good coordination and cooperation with and between other agencies. This requires an understanding of agencies' organizational structures and their roles in fire management. This understanding, coordination, and cooperation will enhance efficiency across jurisdictional boundaries.

Areas and Levels of Coordination and Cooperation

Department of Interior and Agriculture Interagency Agreement

The authority for interagency assistance is found in the Interagency Agreement between the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), National Park Service (NPS), Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) of the United States Department of the Interior (DOI) and the Forest Service (FS) of the United States Department of Agriculture.

Under the Interagency Agreement for Fire Management, Interior agencies support the Forest Service's efforts in international disaster response. The Forest Service has an agreement with the U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) to support OFDA's international disaster relief activities.

Under provisions of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster and Emergency Assistance Act (P.L. 93-233, as amended) and Executive Order 12148, Federal Emergency Management (July 20, 1979, as amended), wildland agencies provide assistance to Presidential declared disasters and emergencies nationwide. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is the overall coordinator of the Federal Response Plan (FRP).

The fire suppression assistance portion of the Stafford Act for state and municipalities is managed by FEMA.

Outside Agency Agreement

The authority for rendering emergency fire or rescue assistance outside of the agencies is given through the Reciprocal Fire Protection Act of May 27, 1955 (69 Stat. 66), and the *DOI Departmental Manual, 620 DM*.

1 **National Level Coordination**

2

3 **Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC)**

4 The Council is a cooperative, interagency organization dedicated to achieving
5 consistent implementation of the goals, actions, and policies in the National Fire
6 Plan and the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy. The Council provides
7 leadership and oversight to ensure policy coordination, accountability and
8 effective implementation of the National Fire Plan and the Federal Wildland
9 Fire Management Policy.

10

11 Members of the WFLC represent the USDA Forest Service and Department of
12 the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, US Fish
13 and Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service. Other participants include
14 the National Association of Counties, Intertribal Timber Council, National
15 Governors Association, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the
16 National Association of State Foresters representing local, state, and tribal
17 governments.

18

19 **Office of Wildland Fire Coordination (OWFC)**

20 The Office of Wildland Fire Coordination is a Department of Interior
21 organization that provides management, coordination, and oversight for the
22 department's wildland fire management programs and policies. It coordinates
23 efforts between wildland fire management bureaus and other federal and non-
24 federal groups.

25

26 **The National Fire and Aviation Executive Board**

27 The Council is a self-directed group, comprised of the federal agency Fire
28 Directors, which provides a forum for discussion in which federal issues, both
29 short and long term, can be resolved. It is authorized based on the master
30 agreement between the Forest Service and DOI agency directors. The Council
31 seeks to improve coordination and integration of federal fire and aviation
32 programs, while recognizing individual agency missions. The Council deals
33 with long-term strategic views and fosters improved integrated operations at
34 national, geographic, and local levels. Teams may be established as needed by
35 the Council to address specific federal issues.

36

37 **National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG)**

38 The purpose of the NWCG is to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of all
39 federal, tribal, and state wildland fire management agencies in the United States.
40 The group accomplishes this goal by coordinating the programs of the
41 participating agencies in order to work together constructively. The NWCG
42 provides a formalized system through which agreement may be reached on
43 substantive issues in fire management. Agreed on policies, standards, and
44 procedures are then implemented directly by each agency. Each agency will
45 identify a representative to NWCG.

46

1 **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)**
2 Under provisions of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster and Emergency Assistance
3 Act (P.L. 93-233, as amended) and the Executive Order 12148, Federal
4 Emergency Management (July 20, 1979, as amended) Wildland Fire
5 Management Agencies can provide assistance to Presidential declared disasters
6 and emergencies nationwide. The Federal Emergency Management Agency
7 (FEMA) is the overall coordinator of the Federal Response Plan (FRP), which
8 guides 26 Federal agencies and the American Red Cross in response activities.
9 In the FRP, the Forest Service is the primary agency responsible for emergency
10 support functions under firefighting.

11
12 **Federal Fire and Aviation Safety Team (FFAST)**
13 This team is comprised of fire and aviation safety representatives from the
14 federal wildland fire agencies and the Aviation Management Directorate
15 (ADM), of the National Business Center. The National Fire and Aviation
16 Management Executive Board charters a FFAST. It functions as a single federal
17 wildland fire and aviation safety staff to oversee and monitor national fire and
18 aviation safety practices, and make recommendations to improve safety and
19 prevent accidents.

20
21 **National Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC) Group**
22 The national MAC group is comprised of the Fire Directors or their designees of
23 the BLM, FS, BIA, NPS, FWS, FEMA, a State Foresters' representative, and a
24 representative of the NWS. The BLM, BIA, FS, NPS, and FWS directors at
25 NIFC have written delegated authority from their respective agency heads to:
26 • Represent their agency on all matters related to wildland fire operations.
27 This includes membership on the national MAC group, determining
28 national priorities, and allocating or reallocating incident resources.
29 • Represent the states' interests in the absence of the State Foresters'
30 representative, as established in the agreement with the National
31 Association of State Foresters.

32
33 When National Preparedness reaches levels 4 and 5, the national MAC group is
34 activated and briefings are conducted twice daily to establish priorities and
35 direction for wildland fire activities.

36
37 **Geographic Area Level Coordination**
38 State/Regional offices oversee and facilitate the implementation of interagency
39 standards and policies developed at the national level. Within their geographic
40 areas, State/Regional Fire Management Officers/Fire Directors help develop and
41 implement interagency wildland fire management programs to improve
42 effectiveness and efficiency. At GACC preparedness level 4/5, a geographic
43 MAC is convened to establish priorities and direction for wildland fire activities
44 by allocating scarce resources. Refer to *National Mobilization Guide, Chapter*
45 *30*.

46

1 **Sub-Geographic Area Coordination**

2 Fire management plans, preparedness plans, mobilization guides, cooperative
3 agreements, and other supporting documents identify the necessary local
4 sources, types, and levels of interagency coordination. They also delineate the
5 process whereby compliance with national and geographic area policies and
6 standards will be achieved. Fire Management Officers and their staffs develop
7 and maintain cooperative interagency relationships. A Sub-Geographic Area
8 MAC should be convened at preparedness level 4/5 to establish priorities and
9 direction for wildland fire activities by allocating scarce resources.

10

11 **Interagency Mobilization**

12

13 **National Dispatch/Coordination System**

14 The wildland fire dispatch system in the United States has three levels (tiers):
15 national, geographic area, and local level. Logistical dispatch operations occur
16 at all three levels, while initial attack dispatch operations occur primarily at the
17 local level. Any geographic area or local dispatch center using a dispatch
18 system outside the three-tier system must justify why a non-standard system is
19 being used.

20 *The National Interagency Mobilization Guide*, which is revised annually,
21 describes interagency mobilization and dispatch procedures at all levels. All
22 state/regional and local units without deviation will follow its directives.

- 23 • **BLM** - Any geographic area or local dispatch center using a dispatch
24 structure outside the approved three-tier system must annually request
25 written authorization from the Director, Office of Fire and Aviation.
- 26 • **FS** - Any geographic area or local dispatch center using a dispatch
27 structure outside the approved three-tier system must annually request
28 written authorization from the Forest Service Regional Director of Fire
29 and Aviation.

30

31 **Levels of Dispatch (Tiers)**

32

33 **National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC)**

34 The National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC) is located at the National
35 Interagency Fire Center (NIFC), Boise, Idaho. The mission of NICC is the cost-
36 effective and timely coordination of land management agency emergency
37 response for wildland fire at the national level. This is accomplished through
38 planning, situation monitoring, and expediting resources orders between the
39 Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Regions, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
40 States, National Park Service (NPS) Regions, Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)
41 Regions, Forest Service (FS) Regions, National Association of State Foresters
42 (NASF), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Regions through
43 the United States Fire Administration (USFA), National Weather Service
44 (NWS) Regions, and other cooperating agencies.

45

1 NICC works with Geographic Area Coordination Centers (GACCs), as well as
2 with other countries (e.g. Canada and Mexico). NICC coordinators also interact
3 with the directors of fire and aviation programs, as well as with the national
4 MAC Group.

5
6 NICC supports non-fire emergencies when tasked by an appropriate agency,
7 such as FEMA, through the Federal Response Plan. NICC collects and
8 consolidates information from the GACCs and disseminates the *National*
9 *Incident Management Situation Report*. This report is sent to the GACCs,
10 agency directors, and Washington Office personnel.

11 **Geographic Area Coordination Centers (GACCs)**

12 There are 11 GACCs, each of which serves a specific geographic portion of the
13 United States. Each GACC interacts with the local dispatch centers, as well as
14 with NICC and neighboring GACCs. Refer to the *National Interagency*
15 *Mobilization Guide* for a complete directory of GACC locations, addresses, and
16 personnel.

17
18 The principal mission of each GACC is to provide the cost-effective and timely
19 coordination of emergency response for all incidents within the specified
20 geographic area. GACCs are also responsible for determining needs,
21 coordinating priorities, and facilitating the mobilization of resources from their
22 areas to other geographic areas.

23
24 Each GACC prepares an intelligence report that consolidates fire and resource
25 status information received from each of the local dispatch centers in its area.
26 This report is sent to NICC and to the local dispatch centers, caches, and agency
27 managers in the geographic area.

28 **Local Unit/Interagency Dispatch Centers**

29
30 Local dispatch centers are located throughout the country as dictated by the
31 needs of fire management agencies. The principal mission of a local dispatch
32 center is to provide safe, timely, and cost-effective coordination of emergency
33 response for all incidents within its specified geographic area. This most often
34 entails the coordination of initial attack responses and the ordering of additional
35 resources when fires escape initial attack.

36
37 Local dispatch centers are also responsible for supplying intelligence
38 information relating to fires and resource status to their GACC and to their
39 agency managers and cooperators. Local dispatch centers may work for or with
40 numerous agencies, but should only report to one GACC.

41
42 Some local dispatch centers are also tasked with law enforcement and agency
43 administrative workloads for non-fire operations; if this is the case, a
44 commensurate amount of funding and training should be provided by the
45 benefiting activity to accompany the increased workload. If a non-wildland fire
46

1 workload is generated by another agency operating in an interagency dispatch
2 center, the agency generating the addition workload should offset this increased
3 workload with additional funding or personnel.

5 **Agreements & Contracts**

7 **Policy**

8 Agreements will be comprised of two components: the actual agreement and an
9 operations plan. The agreement will outline the authority and general
10 responsibilities of each party, and the operations plan will define the specific
11 operating procedures.

12 Any agreement which obligates federal funds or commits anything of value
13 must be signed by the appropriate warranted contracting officer. Specifications
14 for funding responsibilities should include billing procedures and schedules for
15 payment.

17 Any agreement that extends beyond a fiscal year must be made subject to the
18 availability of funds. Any transfer of federal property must be in accordance
19 with federal property management regulations.

21 All agreements must undergo periodic joint review; and, as appropriate,
22 revision. The best general reference on agreements is *Partnership for Efficiency
23 through Cooperative Agreements* by the NWCG.

25 Assistance in preparing agreements can be obtained from local or state office
26 fire and/or procurement staff.

28 All appropriate agreements and operating plans will be provided to the servicing
29 dispatch center. The authority to enter into interagency agreements is extensive.

- 30 • **BLM** - *BLM Manual 9200, Departmental Manual 620 DM, the Reciprocal
31 Fire Protection Act, 42 U.S.C. 1856, and the Federal Wildland Fire
32 Management Policy and Program Review.*
- 33 • **FWS** - *Service Manual, Departmental Manual 620 DM, and Reciprocal
34 Fire Protection Act, 42U.S.C. 1856.*
- 35 • **NPS** - *Chapter 2, Federal Assistance and Interagency Agreements
36 Guideline (DO-20), and the Departmental Manual 620 (DM-620). NPS-
37 RM-18, Interagency Agreements, Release Number 1, 02/22/99.*
- 38 • **FS** - *FSM 1580, 5106.2 and FSH 1509.11.*

40 **Elements of an Agreement**

41 The following elements should be addressed in each agreement:

- 42 • The authorities appropriate for each party to enter in an agreement.
- 43 • The roles and responsibilities of each agency signing the agreement.

- 1 • An element addressing the cooperative roles of each participant in
2 prevention, pre-suppression, suppression, fuels, and prescribed fire
3 management operations.
- 4 • Reimbursements/Compensation - All mutually approved operations that
5 require reimbursement and/or compensation will be identified and agreed
6 to by all participating parties through a cost-share agreement. The
7 mechanism and timing of the funding exchanges will be identified and
8 agreed upon.
- 9 • Appropriation Limitations - Parties to this agreement are not obligated to
10 make expenditures of funds or reimbursements of expenditures under
11 terms of this agreement unless the Congress of the United States of
12 America appropriates such funds for that purpose by the Counties of -
13 _____, by the Cities of _____, and/or the Governing Board of Fire
14 Commissioners of_____.
- 15 • Liabilities/Waivers - Each party waives all claims against every other party
16 for compensation for any loss, damage, personal injury, or death occurring
17 as a consequence of the performance of this agreement unless gross
18 negligence on any part of any party is determined.
- 19 • Termination Procedure - The agreement shall identify the duration of the
20 agreement and cancellation procedures.
- 21 • A signature page identifying the names of the responsible officials should
22 be included in the agreement.
- 23 • *NPS - Refer to DO-20 for detailed instructions and format for developing*
24 *agreements.*
- 25

26 **Annual Operating Plans (AOPs)**

27 Each agreement shall be accompanied by an Annual Operating Plan, which shall
28 be reviewed, updated, and approved prior to the fire season. The plan may be
29 amended after a major incident as part of a joint debriefing and review.

- 30 • The plan shall contain detailed, specific procedures which will provide for
31 safe, efficient, and effective operations.
- 32 • A completed and authorized Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) is
33 required for each federal communications center.
- 34

35 **Elements of an AOP**

36 The following items shall be addressed in the operating plan:

- 37 • **Mutual Aid**
38 The operating plan should address that there may be times when
39 cooperators are involved in emergency operations and unable to provide
40 mutual aid. In this case other cooperators may be contacted for assistance.
- 41 • **Command Structure**
42 Unified command should be used, as appropriate, whenever multiple
43 jurisdictions are involved, unless one or more parties request a single
44 agency incident commander (IC). If there is a question about jurisdiction,
45 fire managers should mutually decide and agree on the command structure

1 as soon as they arrive on the fire; Agency Administrators should confirm
2 this decision as soon as possible. Once this decision has been made, the
3 incident organization in use should be relayed to all units on the incident as
4 well as dispatch centers. In all cases, the identity of the IC must be made
5 known to all fireline and support personnel.

6 • **Communications**

7 In mutual aid situations, a common designated radio frequency identified
8 in the operating plan should be used for incident communications. All
9 incident resources should utilize and monitor this frequency for incident
10 information, tactical use, and changes in weather conditions or other
11 emergency situations. In some cases, because of equipment availability/
12 capabilities, departments/agencies may have to use their own frequencies
13 for tactical operations, allowing the “common” frequency to be the link
14 between departments. It is important that all department /agencies change
15 to a single frequency or establish a common communications link as soon
16 as practical. Clear text should be used. Avoid personal identifiers, such as
17 names. This paragraph in the Annual Operating Plan shall meet Federal
18 Communications Commission (FCC) requirements for documenting shared
19 use of radio frequencies.

20 • **Distance/Boundaries**

21 Responding and requesting parties should identify any mileage limitations
22 from mutual boundaries where “mutual aid” is either pay or non-pay status.
23 Also, for some fire departments, the mileage issue may not be one of initial
24 attack “mutual aid,” but of mutual assistance. In this situation, you may
25 have the option to make it part of this agreement or identify it as a situation
26 where the request would be made to the agency having jurisdiction, which
27 would then dispatch the fire department.

28 • **Time/Duration**

29 Responding and requesting parties should identify time limitations (usually
30 24 hours) for resources in a non-reimbursable status, and “rental rates”
31 when the resources are in a reimbursable status. Use of geographic area
32 interagency equipment rates is strongly encouraged.

33 • **Qualifications/Minimum Requirements**

34 Agencies, under the National Interagency Incident Management System
35 (NIIMS) concept, have agreed to accept cooperator’s standards for fire
36 personnel qualifications and equipment during initial attack. Once
37 jurisdiction is clearly established, then the standards of the agency(s) with
38 jurisdiction prevail. This direction may be found in the documents *NWCG*
39 *Clarification of Qualifications Standards - Initial Attack 6/20/01*.

40 • **Reimbursement/Compensation**

41 Compensation should be “standard” for all fire departments in the
42 geographic area. The rates identified shall be used. Reimbursements
43 should be negotiated on a case-by-case basis, as some fire departments
44 may not expect full compensation, but only reimbursement for their actual
45 costs. Vehicles and equipment operated under the federal excess property
46 system will only be reimbursed for maintenance and operating costs.

- 1 • **Cooperation**
2 The annual operating plan will be used to identify how the cooperators will
3 share expertise, training, and information on items such as prevention,
4 investigation, safety, and training.
- 5 • **Dispatch Center**
6 Dispatch centers will ensure all resources know the name of the assigned
7 IC and announce all changes in incident command. Geographic Area
8 Mobilization Guides, Zone Mobilization Guides and Local Mobilization
9 Guides should include this procedure as they are revised for each fire
10 season.

11
12 **Types of Agreements**

13
14 **National Interagency Agreements**

15 The national agreement, which serves as an umbrella for interagency assistance
16 among federal agencies is the Interagency Agreement Between the Bureau of
17 Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, Fish and
18 Wildlife Service of the United States Department of the Interior, and the Forest
19 Service of the United States Department of Agriculture. This and other national
20 agreements give substantial latitude while providing a framework for the
21 development of state and local agreements and operating plans.

22
23 **Regional/State Interagency Agreements**

24 Regional and state cooperative agreements shall be developed for mutual aid
25 assistance. These agreements are essential to the fire management program.
26 Concerns for area-wide scope should be addressed through these agreements.

27
28 **Local Interagency Agreements**

29 Local units are responsible for developing agreements or contracts with local
30 agencies and fire departments to meet mutual needs for suppression and/or
31 prescribed fire services.

32
33 **Emergency Assistance**

34 Emergency assistance may be provided by agencies to adjacent jurisdictions
35 upon their request, without a formalized agreement. However, to provide safe,
36 efficient, and effective emergency responses, units must enter into agreements
37 with emergency response agencies. The appropriate Agency Administrator must
38 approve local emergency response.

39
40 **FEMA and the Wildland Fire Program**

41 FEMA guides 26 federal agencies and the American Red Cross in response
42 activities. The Federal Response Plan (FRP) is based on the fundamental
43 assumption that a significant disaster or emergency will overwhelm the
44 capability of state and local governments to carry out extensive emergency
45 operations. These operations have been grouped into 12 Emergency Support

1 Functions (ESFs); departments and agencies have been assigned primary and
2 support responsibilities for each of these functions.

3
4 The fire suppression assistance portion of the Stafford Act for state and
5 municipalities is ESF4. The lead federal agency for ESF4 is the USDA Forest
6 Service with the Department of the Interior as a supporting agency.

7 8 **International Cooperation**

9 10 **U.S. - Mexico Cross Border Cooperation on Wildland Fires**

11 In June of 1999, the Department of Interior and the Department of Agriculture
12 signed a Wildfire Protection Agreement with Mexico. The agreement has two
13 purposes:

- 14 • To enable wildfire protection resources originating in the territory of one
15 country to cross the United States-Mexico border in order to suppress
16 wildfires on the other side of the border within the zone of mutual
17 assistance (10 miles/16 kilometers) in appropriate circumstances.
- 18 • To give authority for Mexican and U.S. fire management organizations to
19 cooperate on other fire management activities outside the zone of mutual
20 assistance.

21
22 National Operational Guidelines are being developed for this agreement, which
23 will be put into the *National Interagency Mobilization Guide*. These guidelines
24 cover issues at the national level and also provide a template for those issues that
25 need to be addressed in local operating plans. The local operating plans identify
26 how the agreement will be implemented by the GACCs (and Zone Coordination
27 Centers) that have dispatching responsibility on the border. The local operating
28 plans will provide the standard operational procedures for wildfire suppression
29 resources that could potentially cross the U.S. border into Mexico.

30 31 **U.S - Canada, Reciprocal Forest Fire Fighting Arrangement**

32 Information about United States - Canada cross border support is located in
33 Chapter 40 of the *National Interagency Mobilization Guide*.

34
35 This chapter provides policy guidance, which was determined by an exchange of
36 diplomatic notes between the U.S. and Canada in 1982.

37
38 This chapter also provides operational guidelines for the Canada – U.S.
39 Reciprocal Forest Fire Fighting Arrangement. These guidelines are updated
40 yearly.

41 42 **U.S. - Australia/New Zealand Wildland Fire Arrangement**

43 Information about United States - Australia/New Zealand support is located in
44 Chapter 40 of the *National Interagency Mobilization Guide*.

45 This chapter provides a copy of the arrangements signed between the U.S. and
46 the states of Australia and the country of New Zealand for support to one

1 another during severe fire seasons. It also contains the Annual Operating Plan
2 that provides more detail on the procedures, responsibilities, and requirements
3 used during activation.

4 **International Disasters Support**

5 Federal wildland fire employees may be requested through the Forest Service, to
6 support the U.S. Government's (USG) response to international disasters by
7 serving on Disaster Assistance Response Teams (DARTs). A DART is the
8 operational equivalent of an ICS team used by the U.S. Agency for International
9 Development's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) to provide an on-
10 the-ground operational capability at the site of an international disaster. Prior to
11 being requested for a DART assignment, employees will have completed a
12 weeklong DART training course covering information about:

- 14 • USG agencies charged with the responsibility to coordinate USG responses
15 to international disaster.
- 16 • The purpose, organizational structure, and operational procedures of a
17 DART.
- 18 • How the DART relates to other international organizations and countries
19 during an assignment. Requests for these assignments are coordinated
20 through the FS International Programs, Disaster Assistance Support
21 Program (DASP).
- 22 • DART assignments should not be confused with technical exchange
23 activities, which do not require DART training. More information about
24 DARTs can be obtained at the FS International Program's website:
25 <http://www.fs.fed.us/global/aboutus/dasp/welcome.htm>.

26 **Contracts**

27 Contracts may be used where they are the most cost-effective means of
28 providing for protection commensurate with established standards. A contract,
29 however, does not absolve an Agency Administrator of the responsibility for
30 managing a fire program. The office's approved fire management plan must
31 define the role of the contractor in the overall program.

32
33
34 Contracts should be developed and administered in accordance with federal
35 acquisition regulations. In particular, a contract should specify conditions for
36 abandonment of a fire in order to respond to a new call elsewhere.