



**TO :**

**FROM :** National Wildfire Coordinating Group

**REPLY TO :** NWCG@nifc.gov

**DATE :** 07/18/2002

**SUBJECT :** SAFETY BULLETIN : East Marble 24 and 72 Hour Reports

---

Attached are the 24 and 72 Hour Reports for the East Marble fire on the Ute Mountain Ute Indian Reservation.

---



United States Department of the Interior  
BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS  
NATIONAL INTERAGENCY FIRE CENTER  
3833 SOUTH DEVELOPMENT AVENUE  
BOISE, IDAHO 83705-5354

## **Marble Fire Deployment Investigation**

### **72 Hour Brief**

On July 14, 2002, two lightning-caused fires were detected on Marble Mountain on the Ute Mountain Ute Indian Reservation in Southern Colorado. These fires were initially attacked by two 3-person modules from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. They were inserted by helicopter on a mid-slope helispot between 1930 and 2000 hours, and the helicopter departed the area for another assignment. The fires were designated as the "North Marble" and "East Marble" fires.

Radio communications both to Durango Dispatch and between the fires was poor to non-existent. The fires were about 2100 feet apart, and separated by a steep ridge. At 2130 hours, the firefighters on the "North Marble" fire noticed a glow on the horizon coming from the "East Marble" fire. By 2134 hours, the winds had rapidly increased to 35-45 mph and were blowing burning embers from the "East Marble" fire past the 3 firefighters on the "North Marble" fire.

When the fire crested the ridge between the two fires, the Incident Commander on the "North Marble" directed his crewmembers to move to a rock scree slope that was designated as their Safety Zone, and to deploy their fire shelters. They entered the shelters at approximately 2145 hours and remained in them until about 2330 hours. After they emerged from their shelters, they stayed on the site overnight because of the steep rocky terrain and the darkness. None of the 3 firefighters were injured, and their fire shelters performed as designed. The firefighters were evacuated by helicopter on the next morning. The 3 person I.A. module that had been working on the "East Marble" fire observed the escalating fire behavior conditions on their fire, and hiked out to a safety zone; they did not deploy fire shelters.

### **Lessons for the Field**

Based upon the preliminary findings by the Investigation Team, the following Lessons Learned should be transmitted to all Wildland firefighters for the remainder of the 2002 Fire Season.

1. Incident Commander of the North Marble fire identified safety zones from the helicopter before committing to the fire.

2. Fire Shelter training works! Based on interviews with the individuals that deployed, their refresher fire shelter deployment training was a good representation of the conditions they faced in an actual deployment event. The winds were strong, and required that they hold down the shelters; the noise was loud, not unlike a nearby train; the red/orange glow could be seen through the pinholes in the shelters; and holding down the edges of the shelters restricted the entry of heat and gases.

3. Deployment on a rock scree slope proved successful, as shown in “Your Fire Shelter – 2001 Editions”, but requires special efforts to get a good seal to prevent heat and gases from entering. Firefighters in a deployment situation should consider rock scree slopes only as a last resort deployment area if other options are available.

4. In areas of known radio communications problems, mitigation measures must be identified before firefighters are assigned to the area.

5. Strong leadership was an important factor in the safe successful deployment: directions were clearly given, and were understood and followed.

The report of the Interagency Marble Fire Deployment Investigation Team will be issued within 45 days.

/s/ John Waconda  
BIA – SW Regional Forester



United States Department of the Interior  
BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS  
NATIONAL INTERAGENCY FIRE CENTER  
3833 SOUTH DEVELOPMENT AVENUE  
BOISE, IDAHO 83705-5354

**Marble Fire Shelter Deployment Investigation**

**24 Hour Briefing**

On Sunday, July 14, 2002 at approximately 2130 hours, 3 Bureau of Indian Affairs initial attack firefighters assigned to the Marble Fire on the Ute Mountain Ute Indian Reservation, Colorado deployed fire shelters because of a dramatic increase in wind velocity, which caused an adjacent fire to overtake their position.

Shelters were successfully deployed on a rock scree slope and the firefighters remained in their shelters for approximately 1 ½ hours.

The firefighters endured the entrapment with no injuries. Because of the terrain in the area and darkness, the firefighters spent the remainder of the night at the deployment site, and were evacuated on the morning of Monday, July 15, 2002.

At the present time, an Interagency Fire Shelter Deployment Investigation Team is on site, and their report will be issued in 45 days. Critical Incident Stress debriefing was provided to the affected individuals on Monday, July 15, 2002.

/s/ Roy Door e, Team Leader  
Interagency Investigation Team