



USDA Forest Service Supplement

to

A Preparedness Guide for Firefighters and Their Families

April 2020



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July 2019
Updated April 2020

On July 2, 2019, in coordination with the Week of Remembrance, NWCG released a proof-of-concept document *A Preparedness Guide for Firefighters and Their Families* (<https://www.nwcg.gov/sites/default/files/committee/docs/rmc-preparedness-guide-for-fighters-and-their-families.pdf>). This valuable resource provides honest information, resources for assistance, and conversation starters to give you, the firefighter, tools that will be helpful in preparing yourself and your family for realities of a career in wildland firefighting.

The *Preparedness Guide* has information that is useful to wildland firefighters regardless of agency. However, there is additional information specific to the USDA Forest Service that could also prove helpful. The intent of this supplement is to provide resources and processes that are specific to our agency, including:

- the Employee Assistance Program;
- USDA Forest Service Casualty Assistance Program; and
- post-accident learning reviews.

The unprecedented circumstances of 2020 present new challenges for first responders as we learn how to respond to emergencies amidst a global pandemic. Several links to resources about COVID-19 are provided in the section “Response to COVID-19.” These resources include general protection measures from CDC, as well as NWCG and agency updates specific to our missions.

Feedback will drive the next iteration of *A Preparedness Guide for Firefighters and Their Families*, which is a project of the NWCG Risk Management Committee. USDA Forest Service Employees are encouraged to provide feedback to our representative on that committee. A current roster can be found at <https://www.nwcg.gov/committees/risk-management-committee/roster>.

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Employee Assistance Program

Agency sponsored Employee Assistance Programs provide employees and their families with free resources such as counseling. Each USDA Forest Service Region has a separate EAP contract and phone number. See the table below to connect with the EAP in your region.

USDA Forest Service EAP Vendors

Region 1

EAP # 800-869-0276

Vendor Espyr

<http://www.eapconsultants.com/>

user: fsregion1

Regions 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, WO, Research Stations, and IITF

EAP # 800-222-0364

Vendor FOH

<http://www.foh4you.com/>

Region 4

EAP # 1-888-290-4327

Vendor ComPsych

http://fsweb.r4.fs.fed.us/unit/cr/eap/docs/eap_brochure.pdf

Region 6

EAP # 1-800-869-0276

Vendor Espyr

<https://espyr.com/>

Forest

Products Link on homepage to EAP pdf brochure

Lab

EAP # 1.800.458.1930

Vendor FEI Behavioral Health

<http://www.feieap.com>

user: fsr9

USDA Forest Service Casualty Assistance Program

It is the intent of the USDA Forest Service to provide immediate assistance and support to survivors, families, and coworkers of those who die or are seriously injured in the line of duty.

The Casualty Assistance Program (CAP) focuses on injuries or fatalities that occur while employees are performing the USDA Forest Service mission. The CAP website contains policy, procedures, training, tools, and resources: <http://fsweb.wo.fs.fed.us/cap>. (Note that this is an internal website accessible by employees. The information may be printed for sharing with family members.)

Loved ones and family members may have immediate questions about how the USDA Forest Service can assist. Official policy on agency response to death and serious injury is detailed in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1309.19. It is publicly available online at https://www.fs.fed.us/cgi-bin/Directives/get_dirs/fsh?1309.19

These are some of the more common questions and answers provided by USDA Forest Service policy.

Q: Does the USDA Forest Service provide liaison services to the family?

A: Depending on the circumstance, the Line Officer may assign liaisons to assist. These may include hospital liaison, family liaison, or funeral liaison. (FSH 1309.19, Chapter 20).

Q: Can the USDA Forest Service pay for family members to travel when a firefighter is critically injured?

A: Yes. When an employee is seriously injured while on assignment (including while in travel status), or suffers a medical emergency in travel status, appropriated funds, on a case-by-case basis, may be used to pay for travel expenses of family members. Family members may travel to the location where an employee is receiving medical treatment to serve as a non-medical attendant or because their presence is required by law during the evaluation or treatment of a patient. Dependent family members incapable of self-care may also be authorized to travel. (FSH 1309.19, Chapter 30).

Q: Can the USDA Forest Service pay for the family to attend federally sponsored award ceremonies or memorial services?

A: Yes, the USDA Forest Service may pay travel expenses for one family representative to receive the award. Families of deceased employees may not travel at government expense to attend private award ceremonies, memorial services, or other functions not federally sponsored (FSH 1309.19, Chapter 60).

Q: Does the USDA Forest Service pay for any death benefits?

A: Public Law 104-208, Section 651 (codified as a note to 5 USC 8133 and 8134), authorizes agencies to pay up to \$10,000 in burial costs and related expenses, as a death gratuity to the personal representative of any employee who

dies in the line of duty. This payment is authorized by Albuquerque Service Center-Human Resources Management/Workers Compensation Branch only when the worker's compensation claim is adjudicated and accepted by the Department of Labor. (FSH 1309.19, Chapter 40).

USDA Forest Service Actions Following Death or Serious Injury

What happens now?

Unexpected serious injury or death invokes a unique set of emotional challenges and responses. The injured and their families face numerous hurdles through treatment and recovery. Survivors are left with a sense of unreality, helplessness, and unfinished business; they want to understand what happened and try to bring some meaning to their loss.

Liaisons

In the event of a serious injury or line of duty death, the Line Officer may assign Family or Hospital Liaisons to assist the victim and/or the family. The Liaison represents the agency, provides support, and helps guide the family through the maze of emotional decisions that need to be made. Liaisons bring solace, a calm presence, and compassion to an otherwise turbulent situation.

Specifically, the Hospital Liaison facilitates communication between the employee, family, Human Resources Management, the medical treatment facility, home unit, and the Incident Comp/Claims Specialist if the injury occurred on an incident. The Hospital Liaison may also coordinate patient transportation and other needs.

The Family Liaison provides support and agency connection to the family of a deceased employee and facilitates communication between the family and agency officials. The Family Liaison is a facilitator, not a decision maker.

Actions in the first 24 hours

The agency can also initiate actions in the best interest of the family that may or may not directly involve the family but are critical to managing the incident.

In the first 24 hours, the agency may

- assign an on-scene coordinator to manage the overall incident and immediate medical care
- protect the scene and gather factual information;
- notify the immediate family or next of kin, and law enforcement officials;
- provide support and care to the immediate family;
- protect and care for others who were involved with or witnessed the incident;
- assign public affairs to manage communication needs and protect the victim's identity until formal notification has been made;
- notify agency officials including the local line officer, immediate supervisor, and home unit;
- assign hospital or family liaison;
- notify appropriate jurisdictional authorities and/or partner agencies;
- notify Albuquerque Service Center - Human Resource Management/Workers

Compensation;

- request a benefits coordinator and workers compensation coordinator;
- notify Albuquerque Service Center - Travel to initiate a travel request for the injured employee and/or family members;
- contact regional critical incident stress coordinator to initiate a Critical Incident Stress Management team;
- assign, activate, and dispatch a Facilitated Learning Analysis team;
- assign, activate, and dispatch a Coordinated Response Protocol team; and
- determine the need for an Incident Management Team, based on the complexity of the incident.

Actions beyond 24 hours

Beyond 24 hours, the agency may

- order a Care Team to assist the affected unit in the development of a strategic response to death and /or serious injury, coordinate administrative activities, and minimize the unit's workload;
- coordinate with the Hospital Liaison to ensure the needs of the injured and their family are being met in accordance with agency policy and procedure;
- coordinate with the Family Liaison to learn the family's preference regarding the Memorial Service and attendance by Forest Service, Federal, State and local personnel dignitaries;
- address the immediate and long-term needs of affected fellow employees;
- assign personnel to assist the CRP, FLA, Office of Inspector General (OIG), Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and other investigation teams; and
- return personal property to the employee or family as soon as items have been released by agency officials.

Post-Accident Inquiries

There are two main types of accident reviews used by the USDA Forest Service: Facilitated Learning Analysis (FLA), and Critical Response Protocol (CRP).

The Facilitated Learning Analysis (FLA) is used on incidents as well as program reviews and is most common on fireline accidents involving serious injuries or fatalities. It is intended to provide organizational learning and not fault-finding. Learn more on the FLA Implementation Guide website:

<https://www.wildfirelessons.net/viewdocument/facilitated-learning-analysis-imple-1> .

The Critical Response Protocol (CRP) is an agency-level investigation that typically occurs with fatalities or burn-overs involving multiple people. It is the process the USDA Forest Service uses to learn from tragic events. The CRP uses pre-trained response team members who work collaboratively to try to learn as much as possible from the tragedy while minimizing further harm to our employees to the extent possible. It is designed for incidents involving on-duty employees that include a fatality or more than three hospitalizations.

Although efforts are made to minimize impacts to people involved in traumatic situations, employees may be interviewed more than once and for more than one type of inquiry. Different types of reviews, such as fire cause determinations, criminal or civil investigations, and learning reviews, are intentionally kept separate.

The CRP process actively seeks to minimize the number of interviews to which our personnel are exposed and to control access to our employees. The CRP

- synchronizes all internal agency response groups, including the Learning Review Team, Peer Support/Critical Incident Stress Management, Law Enforcement and Investigations, Union, Communications, and Human Resource Management.
- makes every effort to coordinate external investigations, such as those required by Occupational Safety and Health Administration, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Office of Inspector General, state and local law enforcement, coroner's offices, and other cooperators and partners.
- includes a Learning Review (LR) that replaces the Serious Accident Investigation process. The Learning Review collects information to help build individual and organizational products to support our ability to learn from the event.
- seeks a minimal impact investigation. When accidents happen, our organization's response affects both employee morale and our future safety. We must learn everything we can from those events to prevent recurrence. We want to minimize impacts to survivors and witnesses while managing required investigation activities.
- was developed by safety experts. The Human Performance and Innovation and Organizational Learning Research, Development, and Applications (RD&A) unit and the Office of Safety and Occupational Health oversaw the development

of this process. Input was gathered from numerous safety experts within the Forest Service as well as external academics.

Learn more about the CRP process at the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center Web site (<https://www.wildfirelessons.net/home>), or the Office of Safety and Health SharePoint site (<https://ems-portal.usda.gov/sites/fs-osoh/Documents/CRP%20Information%20Sheet%2019May2014.pdf> CRP Information Sheet).

Response to COVID-19

The USDA Forest Service is following USDA and CDC public health guidance as we continue to offer services to the public. There are three official, government-wide sources of up-to-date information about the coronavirus:

<https://www.coronavirus.gov/>

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2Findex.html

<https://www.usa.gov/coronavirus>

Agency information

For answers to agency-specific frequently asked questions, visit

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/about-agency/covid19-updates> .

USDA Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen is providing updates via *Inside the Forest Service*: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/inside-fs/leadership/coronavirus-heres-what-know>

A post specifically related to the 2020 fire year amidst COVID-19 can be found here:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/inside-fs/leadership/2020-fire-year-managing-risk-pandemic>

NWCG-Infectious Disease Guidance for Wildland Fire Incidents, Emergency Medical Committee

<https://www.nwcg.gov/committees/emergency-medical-committee/infectious-disease-guidance>

Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center: COVID-19 and Fire Season 2020

The Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center is hosting a discussion forum which serves as a platform to ask questions, as well as to share ideas, information, and solutions. Join the discussion at <https://www.wildfirelessons.net/communities/community-home?communitykey=fb4f4902-3a9e-4d11-9a68-7e9d81e159de&tab=groupdetails> .

Reduce stress in yourself and others

Sharing the facts and reducing rumors can make this outbreak less stressful. When you share accurate information about COVID-19 you can help people feel less stressed and allow you to connect with them. Learn more at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/share-facts.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fsymptoms-testing%2Fshare-facts.html

Learn more about taking care of your emotional health at

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/selfcare.asp>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration

People with preexisting mental health conditions should continue with their treatment and be aware of new or worsening symptoms. Additional information can be found at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration website:

<https://www.samhsa.gov/disaster-preparedness>.

Taking care of yourself, your friends, and your family can help you cope with stress. Helping others cope with their stress can also make your community stronger.

A reminder for all external communications

*If you are contacted by media (newspaper, television, online blog, podcast), before speaking to them, **please follow these protocols:***

Media: send all media inquiries about COVID-19 to your Forest or Regional PAO. Forest PAOs will work with the Regional PAO and the press office at the WO.

Social media: All COVID-19 related social media and web posts must be cleared through USDA’s Office of Communications. Please follow the protocol for media inquiries.

Congressional/Intergovernmental: If you receive an inquiry from congressional staff at any level (local, state, or DC offices) regarding the Forest Service’s response to COVID-19, please forward it to FAM Legislative Affairs representative, Jake Donnay at Jacob.donnay@usda.gov.