

Fire Preparedness Guide for Line Managers



Prepared by the
Department of the Interior
Fire Coordinating Committee

Introduction

A successful fire management program which includes fire suppression and prescribed fire requires a high state of preparedness to properly manage any single or multiple situation. Preparedness begins long before the fire is reported or the prescribed burn is initiated.

The purpose of this guide is to provide line managers with an easy reference of actions that should be accomplished throughout the year to ensure that the organization is ready for the fire season. Regardless of program size or levels of activity, there is still a safety concern when managing wildland fires. In fact, fires most often related to fatalities occur in light fuel types such as grass or brush and are of such small size that they generally arouse little concern. Complacent attitudes because of low resource values and low fire occurrences are a deadly combination. This guide should be particularly important to managers in locations which have the above conditions and where fire responsibilities fall into the category of "other duties as assigned".

This guide has two sections. The first section lists actions that should occur before, during, and after the fire season, and during a fire incident. The second section lists "watchouts" and "find outs" that should trigger increased preparedness or a change in operational procedures.

A Check List for Line Managers

The purpose of the following check lists is to assist the line manager in preparing for and operating during the fire season. This is not intended to be a complete list but to provide the manager with some of the more important actions that should be accomplished throughout the year.

Pre-season Actions

Preparing for the fire season begins long before the first prescribed fire is ignited or wildfire is reported. By taking certain actions early in the year, you will be in a better position to react to not only the first fire but also for the rest of the season.

1. Know and understand your agency's fire management policy including prescribed fire and wildfire suppression.
2. Support an interagency public education program.
3. Make sure that the public is informed of your fire management plans and policy.
4. Make sure that cooperative fire agreements and operating plans are reviewed and updated with all cooperators.
5. Discuss with adjacent land managers their fire management plans, policies, practices, and procedures.
6. Make sure that prescribed fire plans are completed and approved.
7. Complete revisions of fire prevention plans for the season and implement them as the season progresses.
8. Know your fuel conditions (quantity and moisture) going into the fire season and understand how they compare with the norm. Establish methods for and analyse live fuel moisture.
9. Have contracts, rental agreements, and blanket purchase arrangements current.
10. Program fire training for fire and non-fire personnel during low activity periods and make sure that fire and safety training has been completed.
11. Issue fire qualification (red) cards to your personnel consistent with agency and national interagency standards.
12. Make sure your fire cache is stocked after last fire season to standard stocking levels.
13. Make sure that tools, vehicles, and equipment maintenance is completed and ready for the season.

Fire Season Actions

Once the fire season begins, there are many actions that need to be taken routinely. These actions are to assure that you, as the line manager, are prepared for fires and whatever may result from them.

1. Stay current with the fire activity at the local, regional, and national level. Review the daily situation report.
2. Be briefed on the current fire situation and weather forecast, as needed, disseminate this information to your staff, and advise your supervisor of any concerns that you may have. Increase this activity to a daily function when burning conditions become high.
3. Make sure that unusual or extreme fire conditions have been communicated throughout your organization. Advance information may help reduce response times.
4. Coordinate with your neighbors to ensure adequate initial attack forces for your locality are available to handle any anticipated fire activity.
5. Staff and maintain initial attack forces, detection systems, communications, and supplies as identified in fire plans and as conditions warrant.
6. Make sure your operating plans are being utilized and are working.
7. Assure that adequate non-fire personnel are available for assignment to project fires.
8. Know who will investigate fire starts.

Fire Situations

During periods of fire activity, there are several actions that line managers should take or insure that the fire management officer is taking. They are:

1. Know what your fires are doing at all times and what is being threatened by them.
2. Know the weather forecast for the next 12-48 hours. Take time to plan your course of action for the next two days based on this forecast.
3. Know the condition of your initial attack forces including engines, helicopters, and other major equipment. Are they tired or committed to current fires?
4. Know where your initial attack forces will come from for your next series of new starts.
5. Make sure your support organization is sufficient to handle the fire activity. Remember, local vendors need to be paid promptly.
6. Make sure an escaped fire situation analysis is done for every fire escaping initial attack. Assure proper resource personnel have had input into the analysis.
7. Assign someone to represent you with the incident team on fires in your area.
8. Keep open communications with your local media, elected officials, community leaders, and adjacent land owners.
9. Designate one media spokesperson if you are not able to handle all of the inquiries personally.
10. Initiate rehabilitation efforts as soon as it is safe. Plan long-term rehabilitation needs immediately so that time will not be lost after the fire is out.
11. Assign environmental specialists/resource advisors to fires where resource values are a concern.
12. Assure a fire investigation is started on all human caused fires.

Post Fire Actions

Once the fire situation is under control, the fire is out, and the firefighters gone, another set of actions are necessary. They are:

1. Continue any necessary emergency rehabilitation actions.
2. Conduct a post fire evaluation which includes all aspects of the incident and identify any aspects of the operation that can be improved.
3. Invite the local press, elected officials, community leaders and heads of interest groups to tour the fire area and discuss impacts and rehabilitation efforts.
4. Resupply your fire cache. Rest your crews, if possible. Prepare for the next series of fires.
5. Assure completion of fire cause investigations and appropriate trespass actions taken if warranted.
6. Assure individual fire reports are completed and submitted.

Post Season Actions

After each fire season, it is necessary to review what happened and determine what changes are necessary to improve response and operations for next season. These actions include:

1. Conduct a post fire season meeting to review the season's activities and determine improvements for next year.
2. Review your fire management plans to determine what adjustments need to be made then, make them.
3. Review the effectiveness of fire and safety training and make plans to have necessary training completed for next year.
4. Determine the success of emergency fire rehabilitation actions taken earlier in the fire season.
5. Restock your fire cache to pre-season levels. Refurbish equipment and acquire replacement equipment as necessary.

“Watch Outs” and “Find Outs”

The following list provides line managers with some of the more important situations that should cause them to “watch out” and suggests that they “find out” how to deal with them.

Be aware of and find out what is being done to reduce hazards and risks associated with:

1. weather that has been warmer and drier than normal;
2. a prolonged drought situation with no end in sight;
3. live fuel moisture that is lower than normal for the season;
4. short-range (15-30 day) weather forecasts which are favorable to the health of your resource;
5. recent (last 5 years) forest insect or disease epidemics on your management area;
6. large areas of inaccessible over-mature timber with lots of ladder fuels;
7. large continuous areas of red slash from logging or stand improvement projects on or adjacent to your area; or,
8. public safety and potential ignitions when the fire danger rating is very high or extreme as related to the following activities:

- logging • thinning operations • camping, fishing, hunting, sightseeing
- mining operations • oil and gas activities • livestock grazing activities • illegal “crop” production • wilderness or backcountry use • firewood cutting • wildland/urban interface situations • other activities that have ignition sources involved

Fuels

- you have more fuel than normal • Live fuel moisture is dryer than normal.

Weather

- thunderstorm activity is forecast • hot dry winds are forecast • red flag conditions exist or are forecast

Local activities

- special events where more people are on the land (July 4th activities, hunting season, camping) • Increased logging activities, wood cutters • other activities as identified by fire cause analysis in prevention plans

Personnel Availability

- most firefighters are already dispatched • local cooperators are involved in other activities • early season activity when new seasonals are still inexperienced
- major fire activities occurring elsewhere and normal back up support is limited
 - key fire staff members are not available

Equipment

- engines or support vehicles, pumping equipment, and aircraft are down for repair • communications equipment are not available.

