



2008 Fire Operations Key Points

Executive Summary for AC/IC

April 4, 2008

Background: As fire seasons lengthen and generally become more challenging, the standard messages to the public and news media are becoming less realistic. For years, messages have centered on slight variations of several basic themes: We have enough equipment and personnel; we will protect your home if it is threatened; and we will fight all fires aggressively. But the nature of fire season is changing, and given budget realities, it is time to alter public expectations and increase public education regarding what the wildland fire community can and cannot do.

Themes for 2008

- The world of fire suppression is changing. Fire seasons are longer and fire behavior often more extreme. The primary reasons for these changes are weather (climate change), wood (abundance of fuels) and WUI (structures and increased values at risk).
- Traditional means of containing fires (anchor, flank and pinch) are changing. More often, firefighters use multiple tactics on a single incident such as confine, contain and provide point protection. Under the Interagency Wildland Fire Policy, fire managers have available a full range of options from monitoring a fire to aggressive suppression tactics.
- Determining the available fire management options include these considerations:
 - Safety is always the primary concern in choosing a selected strategy and incorporates mitigated or reduced risk to firefighters and the public.
 - Suppressing a fire effectively means we wisely pick our tactics. Incident managers constantly evaluate the fire situation and initiate actions based on the likelihood that the selected suppression tactics will be successful.
 - Suppressing a fire efficiently means no wasted efforts. Firefighting resources are used where they are needed most and where they are most likely to succeed.
- We will focus resources into initial attack. Catching fires early is still the best way to prevent large, costly and dangerous wildfires.
- Three excellent sources on techniques for homeowners to help protect their property from wildfire can be found at: www.firewise.org, www.livingwithfire.info, and www.firesafecouncil.org. Homeowners must not assume firefighters will step in and save their homes, especially if they have not taken precautionary measures.
- Steps to reduce costs and maximize efficiency without compromising safety will continue to be a priority. Challenges to reducing costs include longer seasons, increased complexity of incidents, more WUI fires and a rise in contract and fixed costs.

Communities:

- Local communities and citizens can contribute to firefighter and public safety and protect their belongings by taking responsibility to ensure there is a defensible space around their homes and businesses. The Firewise program provides information and techniques for homeowners. Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) are becoming increasingly important for coordinating these efforts.
- The primary responsibility for structure protection lies with the local protection authority based on local agreements. The federal wildland firefighting agencies follow federal policy of protecting life, property and natural resources, and provide structure protection assistance on incidents in support of the local protection authority.

Cost Containment:

- The agencies and states have implemented cost accounting measures through improved business practices that provide line officers and incident commanders with real-time information, and create benchmarks of accountability as costs rise.
- Decision support tools are available to help agency administrators and incident managers make more informed decisions in how and where to respond to a wildfire. The Fire Spread Probability (FSPro) program assesses the probabilities and direction of fire spread over time. The Rapid Assessment Values At Risk (RAVAR) program assists managers in determining property and natural resources values in the fire area that need protection.

National Response Framework – All-Hazard Response:

- The primary mission for the agency wildfire qualified personnel is wildland fire management. In the case of a national disaster, the agencies will respond to all-hazard priority assignments based on our capability.
- The National Response Framework (NRF) establishes a single, comprehensive plan for managing domestic incidents. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is responsible for coordinating NRF activities and provides Mission Assignments, sometimes referred to as ‘taskings’ to the federal agencies.

Smoke and Smoke Impacts:

- Fire and smoke are an inevitable and natural part of fire seasons around the country.
- Fire managers take smoke effects into consideration when planning tactics. As they develop their strategies for fighting a fire, firefighters consider fire behavior and weather forecasts, topography and proximity to communities – all factors that can affect smoke.
- Fire communicators will work with state air management agencies to keep the public informed of anticipated smoke movement and the state’s assessment of the health risks associated with smoke levels.

Wildland Fire Use:

- The goal of the WFU objective is to protect, maintain, and enhance resources and, as nearly as possible, allowed fire to function in its natural ecological role as defined within the context of the agency mission, defined boundaries and approved land use/resource management objectives.
- Benefits of actively managing fire on the landscape can include restoring and maintaining healthy forests, rangelands and wetlands, and supporting ecosystem diversity.