

Forest Service Wildland Fire Response Protocol

The Chief's stated vision for success in the 2013 fire season can be defined as *safely achieving reasonable objectives with the least firefighter exposure necessary, while enhancing stakeholder support for our management.*

Building on lessons learned in 2012, utilizing all aspects of Risk Management continues to provide the best framework to successfully achieve this vision. Sound decision making relies on identifying reasonable objectives for protection of critical values at risk, while considering the amount and quality of firefighter exposure and probability of success. We must work now to prepare for the upcoming 2013 fire season. Many of you have been doing the activities and/or actions outlined below. Even so, please review your work to see if you can improve or make adjustments to ensure greater success.

This protocol is broken down into three sections; **Pre-Season** (*Engaging the fire before it starts*); **During Incident** (*Managing incident uncertainty and inherent risk*) and **After Incident** (*Learning and Improving*).

PHASE I – PRE-SEASON

Pre-season preparedness is critical to success when a fire starts. In addition to pre-season preparedness such as the annual fire refresher, work capacity test and other tasks we do to prepare for fire season, we need to address other aspects of preparedness as well. The following should be accomplished **Pre-Season** before a fire starts:

- Build decision maker and key stakeholder capacity to manage the uncertainties and inherent risks of fires.
 - Increase understanding of risk management with key stakeholders and partner agencies.
 - Build Agency Administrator capacity to perform as risk managers.
 - Build Incident Management Team capacity to ensure success of Agency Administrators and improve IMT skills in operational risk management.
- Complete landscape level risk assessments and compare them to the goals and objectives in the Land Resource Management Plan (LRMP)
 - Develop a common understanding of values to be protected by answering three questions; ‘What is important?’ ‘Why is it important?’ and ‘How important is it?’
 - Complete a risk analysis, with key stakeholders and partner agencies, to predetermine the optimal response strategies for protecting values at risk while balancing risks across all categories and in time.
 - Engage key stakeholders and partner agencies in tabletop exercises or other venues to ensure alignment.

PHASE II – DURING INCIDENT

The **During Incident** phase tests our pre-season work and our ability to apply risk management principles. As acknowledged by the National Cohesive Strategy for Wildland Fire Management:

“Safe aggressive initial attack is often the best suppression strategy to keep unwanted wildfires small and costs down.”

Apply this strategy to initial attack where the pre-identified values to be protected are at the greatest risk. Decisions will be based on firefighter/aviator/public safety, values at risk, and probability of

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success. We implement sound financial management and costs are an output of the best risk informed decisions.

Should a fire escape our best initial attack efforts, we must be prepared to manage the uncertainty and inherent risk associated with an emerging incident. To be successful in the **During Incident** phase, we should follow the objectives outlined below in the **Standards for Managing Incident Risk**:

Seven Standards for Managing Incident Risk

Complexity and potential risk of incidents varies greatly. Implementation of these standards requires careful judgment; as the potential risk of an incident increases, the successful risk manager will increase his or her due diligence in meeting these standards.

1. Complete an Incident Risk Assessment

- Develop an assessment of what is at risk (from preseason work or input from key stakeholders for boundary incidents), probabilities of harm, and possible mitigations.

2. Complete a Risk Analysis

- Consider alternatives (objectives, strategies and tactics) against desired outcomes, respondent exposure, probability of success, and values to be protected.

3. Complete Two-Way Risk Communications

- Engage community leaders, local government officials, partners, and other key stakeholders associated with the incident to share the risk picture and enlist input.

4. Conduct Risk Sharing Dialogue (using “Red Book”, Chapter 05.11 framework’s 10 questions)

- Engage senior line officers and political appointees (as appropriate) in dialogue aimed at understanding, acceptance, and support for the alternatives and likely decision.

5. Make the Risk Informed Decision

- Develop a time frame to revisit the decision.

6. Document the Risk assessment, analysis, communication, sharing, and decision in WFDSS.

7. Continue Monitoring and Adjusting as necessary or as conditions change.

- Monitor incident situation; revise the risk process as warranted by changing conditions. Re-engage stakeholders and senior officials as appropriate. Significant changes will likely require updates to the published decision and risk support work.

Direction for Desired Long Duration Events

In areas identified pre-season as having low threats to values to be protected, an engagement strategy designed to meet restoration objectives may be considered. Line officers desiring to use wildland fire as an essential ecological process and natural change agent **must follow the Seven Standards for Managing Incident Risk to the highest level of performance and accountability**. The seven standards, outlined above, should be implemented to ensure that all of the possible risks have been explored. To be clear, Standards 1, 2, 3 and 4 need to be completed pre-season; All Standards apply during the incident.

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Expected Outcomes of Applying Standards for Managing Incident Risk

Effective interaction between Agency Administrators and Incident Commanders is essential to safe, efficient and effective management of incidents, utilizing:

- the **Right Plan** (*i.e., as informed by the **Standards for Managing Incident Risk***)
- in the **Right Place** (*i.e., where we have a reasonable probability of success*)
- at the **Right Time** (*i.e., under favorable conditions for efficient and effective suppression*)
- with the **Right Assets** (*i.e., only those suppression assets needed to safely implement tactics in support of reasonable objectives*)
- for the **Right Duration** (*i.e., release assets as soon as they are no longer needed or other actions to reduce exposure duration*)

Careful attention to these five “**Rights**” will limit unnecessary exposure and expenditure.

PHASE III – AFTER INCIDENT

As a learning organization we should strive to improve how we do business and seek to learn from each incident. The following **After Incident** objectives support that process:

- Complete an incident **After Action Review**.
 - Engage key stakeholders of the incident Review what did and did not work, and suggest improvements.
- Conduct a peer review after action process
 - Engage others who have had similar incidents to learn strategies for improvement.
- Implement plans for improvement
 - Identify who is responsible for ensuring the plans are implemented.