Key Issues
2012

INTRODUCTION

This document is intended to emphasize key issues for 2012 to fire program managers, firefighters and other leaders in the US Forest Service, US DOI Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and State and local wildland fire agencies. The intent is to keep this direction fundamental in nature, as specific and detailed direction exists in many agency and interagency policy documents. This document emphasizes several areas critical to successful fire management.

- Emergency Medical Response
- Aviation Assets
- Local Incident Management Organizations
- Back To Basics
- Training and Development
- Strategic Management of Resources

A component of improving the effectiveness, efficiency, and safety of wildland fire operations means building on success. The following guidance was crafted through discussions with Federal, state, tribal, and local governmental and non-governmental organizational representatives. In developing regional strategies and/or doctrine consider the following:

- Reducing risk to firefighters and the public is the first priority in every fire management activity.

- Sound risk management is the foundation for all management activities. Fire management decisions must be based on the best available science combined with current knowledge of the situation. Evaluation of hazards and consequences of actions is the foundation for risk informed decisions.

- Actively manage the land to make it more resilient to disturbance, in accordance with management objectives. Where land and resource management objectives differ, prudent and safe actions must be taken through collaborative fire planning and suppression response to keep unwanted wildfires from spreading to adjacent jurisdictions.

- Improve and sustain both community and individual responsibilities to prepare for, respond to and recover from wildfire through capacity-building activities.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL RESPONSE

Unit Agency Administrators, Line officers and wildland fire managers should identify and update gaps and implementation practices for emergency medical procedures to ensure emergency medical planning and protocol standards are adequately addressed. These procedures need to address procedures for Incident Management Teams (IMT) to include Incident Emergency Plans, Communication protocols, and medical planning that addresses key safety issues, hazards, and mitigations.

Host unit Agency Administrators will provide the necessary information on local/county/state emergency medical response resource capabilities, capacities, ordering procedures, cooperative agreements, role of dispatch centers, and key contacts or liaisons. Incorporating these procedures and protocols into daily operations and practicing the critical elements should result in faster and more effective medical response and care. Whenever planning for or responding to wildfires, all leaders should be asking: "1) What will we do if someone gets hurt? 2) How will we get them out of here? 3) How long will it take to get them to the hospital?"

AVIATION ASSETS

While airtankers are only one part of a multi-faceted interagency wildfire response effort, they are important to the Federal, state, tribal and local wildland firefighting missions of protecting communities and natural resources from wildfires and successfully managing wildfires. Airtankers play a key role in successful initial attack, which is one of the most difficult and critical components of wildfire management. Successful initial attack of new and emerging fires is a critical part of keeping unwanted wildfires small and less costly. Fire managers must consider competing priorities for the limited airtanker fleet and whether timely delivery of fire retardant is realistic to meet their objective. Managers should have contingency plans for the use of additional heavy and medium helicopters, Single Engine Airtankers, Modular Airborne Firefighting Systems, or cooperator aircraft.

LOCAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATIONS

All wildland fire protection entities are expected to actively participate in the development and membership of local Type 3 Incident Management Organizations. Whether or not a unit has the ability to initiate an expanded response with a formal Type 3 Organization, units must continue to work with their federal, tribal, state and local government partners in preparing to support their own incidents for the first 24 to 48 hours before any ordered team arrives. This will strengthen relationships at the local level.

Each unit should maintain a Type 3 Organization to manage low-complexity extended attack incidents without calling in an off-unit organization. Type 3 Organizations have the advantage of being formed in local partnership, having intimate knowledge of the local social/political and environmental conditions and ability to develop strategy and tactics known to work and make more efficient and effective use of local resources. This reduces the pressure on busy Geographic Areas, since unit fire managers/fire chiefs and local Type 3 Organizations can focus on managing emerging incidents, rather than being deployed with Incident Management Organizations within the Geographic Area. These Type 3 Organizations are essential to maintaining a pool of skilled early to mid-career fire managers and are the foundational group for the Incident Management Organizations.

BACK TO BASICS

It is important to place focus on the fundamental practices which increase safety and effectiveness. Every high performing team trains and practices before playing, and they practice those basic actions that have been used successfully before. Similarly, firefighting resources should focus on their specific fireline task when completing that task safely. While fire management strategies and terminology may change, the basic tenets of fighting fire safely have not. Firefighters must continually review the Standard Firefighting Orders, Watch-out Situations, and other operational guidance contained in the Incident Response Pocket Guide (IRPG) to ensure that work is accomplished in a safe and effective manner according to established incident objectives. Span of control must be sufficient to ensure leader's intent and communication is disseminated to field forces. Incorporate the "6 Minutes for Safety" when conducting "tail gate" sessions, make sure briefings are effective, conduct after action reviews and share what is learned.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Plan for timely replacement of essential wildland fire skills as the demographics of our workforce change and fewer agency personnel are made available for fire management assignments due to a variety of professional and personal reasons. It is important to inventory organizations annually to determine local and off-unit support capability. Maintaining a robust integrated fire management skill set is an investment for the future of the interagency fire community. Short term cost concerns should not preclude a commitment to training and the use of trainees on incidents. The cost of choosing not to train comes at a substantially higher cost than training.

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES

During periods of high fire activity, firefighting resources must be managed such that the highest priority missions are accomplished. When this occurs, alternative management strategies should be analyzed. Strategies and tactics must be adapted to maximize effectiveness of the available firefighting resources. Incident objectives should be commensurate with resource availability. Alternative management strategies must focus on efficient and effective use of existing resources to address specific prioritized missions within defined time periods.

Consider establishing local MAC groups or Area Command within a specified area to increase the efficiency and productive allocation of the existing firefighting resources. Incident prioritization, resource coordination, and strategic planning activities are enhanced with these types of organizations in place.

For long duration fires, it is important to identify and establish strategic actions and decision points early in the planning process. Utilize available resources to accomplish preparatory work as soon as possible, when required resources are available and not assigned to other incidents.

Local units and geographic areas will identify ready reserve resources and make them available for initial attack, extended attack, and emerging incidents in response to area and national priorities. These reserves typically consist of a mix of the following kinds of resources:

- Type 1 Crews
- Type 2 Initial Attack Crews
- Engines,
- Aviation assets (e.g. Helicopter, Single Engine Air Tanker, Lead Plane, Air Attack Platform, etc.)
- Overhead positions identified as situation demands (e.g. Division Group Supervisor, Incident Commander Type 3, Helicopter Managers, Helicopter Modules, Air Tactical Group Supervisors, etc.)

These ready reserve resources may come and go from a large fire or longer duration incident, working specific tasks that are accomplished within a defined timeframe and then move on to another assignment. Ready reserve resources may also be expanded to other fire support resources.