

9 - Initial Attack

Policy

All fire management activities will be based on firefighter and public safety, cost effectiveness, and values to be protected consistent with resource objectives, by using the full range of strategic and tactical options as described in an approved, NEPA compliant Fire Management Plan (FMP).

In areas where an approved FMP exists, naturally ignited fires may be managed to benefit resource values in accordance with the preplanned conditions and objectives outlined in the plan.

All initial attack incident commanders must have completed basic training in wildland fire cause determination.

Local units will establish standard response times for all initial attack resources.

All personnel arriving at an incident, must receive a briefing from the incident commander (IC), or delegate, prior to initiating any actions on the incident. Incoming IC's must place a priority on providing briefings to resources already on the scene. The principles of LCES must be implemented prior to the initiation of any actions.(FWS)

Objectives

It has been documented that the greatest risk to firefighters is during the initial attack phase of fire suppression. Therefore, the objective of initial attack fire suppression is to provide safe operations that are consistent with an approved FMP.

All Incident Commanders must be evaluated by managers to ensure that suppression operations safely and efficiently meet current policy and FMP objectives.

Initial Attack Dispatch

Standard Operating Procedures

Field offices with dispatching responsibility, in conjunction with their cooperators, will ensure dispatch standard operating procedures (SOPs) are developed. Agency Administrators will ensure that an annual review verifies that required elements are updated and in place, and that written, approved procedures are fully implemented and adhered to during dispatching operations. (See *Preparedness Review Guide* for specific information on review procedures.)(USFS)

There are variations in the required elements for dispatch SOPs due to many factors (activity level/complexities, interagency coordination, all-risk incidents, hazmat). However, the following topics shall be identified (at a minimum) in a dispatch center's SOP. The elements identified under the topics are examples of what should be covered. Additional guidance can be obtained by reviewing local unit fire management reference guides.

Organization: chain-of-command/table of organization for local agencies and cooperators; notification process/procedures; roles/responsibilities, etc.

Dispatch Operations:

- General Information
- Dispatcher Role and Responsibilities
- Dispatcher Training and Qualifications
- Procedures for Dispatch of Resources Off Unit

Daily Duties:

- Check-In/Out of Administrative/Fire Personnel
- Intelligence
- Weather/Briefings
- Verify Initial Attack Response Levels
- Status Suppression Resources
- Preparedness Level Establishment and Verification

Initial Attack Response Plan (synonymous terminology—preplanned dispatch plans, run-cards, dispatch procedures): general information relating to the plan; procedures for identifying preparedness levels; notification to suppression forces and management of new fire starts or ongoing fire activity; modification/update procedures for the plan; procedures to follow when activity exceeds the initial attack plan, etc.

Emergency Operations (Fire/Non-fire):

- Notification of a Fire Report
- Land Status Verification
- IA Response Plan Activation
- Agency and Area Notification
- Move-up and Cover Procedures
- Call-back Procedures
- Evacuation of Fire Area
- Closing Public/Private Roads
- Ordering Additional Personnel, Equipment, Aircraft
- Fire Weather Watch and Red Flag Warning Notification
- Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFR)
- Agency Duty Officers (Roles and Responsibilities)
- Aircraft Pre-Accident Plan
- Agency Employee Accident Plan

- Utility Company Notification (Power and Gas)
- Law Enforcement Dispatching Procedures/Requirements
- Hazmat/Spill Response Notification Procedures
- Local Government Requesting All-risk Assistance
- Search and Rescue

Local Agreements: Copies of all interagency or inter-district agreements governing the use of suppression resources, including maps delineating areas of responsibility for fire suppression coverage.

Communications: Procedures for assigning/managing local radio frequencies; procedures for obtaining additional frequencies; a map of repeater sites/frequencies; instructions for using local dispatch radio consoles, phones, computers, fax machines, paging systems, etc.

Weather: processing of weather observations via WIIMS; daily posting and briefing procedures; broadcasts of fire weather forecasts to local fire suppression personnel; procedures for processing spot weather forecast requests and disseminating spot forecasts to the field; procedures for immediate notification to fire suppression personnel of Fire Weather Watches and Red Flag Warnings.

Fire Danger: remain aware of locally significant fire danger indices and record those values daily; update and post monthly the seasonal trends of those values vs average.

Information to be Provided by Dispatch for Suppression/Support

Personnel: resource availability/shortages; radio frequencies to be used; burning conditions/fuel types; weather forecast updates; local fire activity; agency policies etc. For Management: fire activity; incident updates; weather updates; resource status.

Time frames and frequencies/locations for daily briefings must be clearly specified in the local dispatch SOP. A method should also be identified for documenting briefings (time given, content of briefing, and person(s) conducting and receiving briefing).

Preparedness Levels: general information relating to the local preparedness plan; procedures for identifying level; notification to management; dispatching roles and responsibilities at each preparedness level, etc.

Specific triggers should be incorporated into preparedness plans that cause the preparedness level to move up or down. These triggers could be related to number/size of fires, amount and type of resources available/committed, regional/national fire situation, condition of local fuels, observed fire behavior, and human-caused risk or predicted lightning activity level, etc. Specific actions should also be tied to each preparedness level, such as prepositioning of suppression resources (crews, engines, airtankers, smokejumpers, etc.), the activation of local MAC Groups, making contacts with other agencies, and hiring of CWN aircraft, emergency equipment rental equipment (EERA), or AD crews.

Aviation: ordering/scheduling requirements and procedures; special use airspace; special use mission requirements; incident/accident reporting and documentation procedures; flight management/tracking procedures.

Dispatch Center Staffing Plan: call-out procedures for additional personnel in emergency situations; designation of duty officer for dispatch center; shift limitations and day off/R&R policy; EFF hiring, etc.

Expanded Dispatch Plan: indicators for considering establishment of expanded dispatch; recommended organization and points of contact; overhead positions to order; location/facilities; equipment/supplies; support needs; procurement or buying unit team considerations; service and supply plan, etc.

Administrative Items: funding, travel, time sheets, fire reports, etc.

Accident/Incident: criteria/definitions; agency notification and documentation requirements; procedures for mobilization of critical incident stress debriefing teams, etc.

Medical Plan: activation/evacuation information; medical facility locations and phone numbers; air and ground transport (Medivac) capability; burn center information, etc.

Media Plan: general procedures; notification requirements to agency external affairs personnel; routing for media calls.

Fire Sizeup

At the earliest opportunity after arrival on an incident, the initial attack incident commander will, at a minimum, relay the information in **Appendix H** to the agency dispatch, and continue to keep the dispatcher informed of any significant changes and progress on the fire.

Fire Cause Determination Checklist

Take investigation materials to incident.

- Make notes of all your actions and findings:
- Time fire was reported.
- Name and ID of reporting party.
- En route observations – people and vehicles.
- Name and ID of persons or vehicles in vicinity of fire origin.
- Weather observations.
- Locate and protect the fire point of origin. (Use a GPS to record lat./long. or UTM, depending on local policy.)
- Search fire origin area for physical evidence of fire cause.
- Protect evidence. Do not remove unless necessary to prevent destruction.
- Make sketches of origin area using accurate measurements in relation to locations of all evidence photographs from all angles (include long and medium distance, as well as closeup views) of fire origin area and important evidence. Document in photo evidence log.
- Turn over all notes, information, and physical evidence to the responsible law enforcement representative, or make your notes part of the official fire record.

For additional information on Fire Cause Determination procedures, see Chapter 13, Reviews and Investigations.

Operational Briefings

Procedures and Guidelines

It is BLM policy for the IC, or their delegate, to brief all personnel who arrive at an incident before assignment. (usfs)

If aurally delivered firefighters cannot be briefed prior to departure from base, the receiving dispatch office will provide a briefing to the supervisor by radio. In all cases, aurally delivered firefighters will be briefed prior to starting work. All operational briefings will be documented by the IC or their delegate.

The Operational Briefing Checklist found in **Appendix I** contains the minimum items required to brief all incoming crews, personnel, or resources. Units are encouraged to expand the minimum briefing, as appropriate, to ensure that safety and efficiency are addressed.

Spot Weather Forecast

Spot weather forecasts should be requested for fires that have potential for extreme fire behavior, exceeding initial attack, or are located in areas where Red Flag Warnings have been issued. See spot weather form in **Appendix J**.

Strategy & Tactics

Determining appropriate initial attack strategies and tactics must be based on the main incident and management objective—providing for firefighter and public safety. There are other factors, including fire behavior (rate of spread, fuel type(s), flame length), which along with values at risk and resources available, often dictate which strategies and tactics should be used.

When selecting and implementing strategy and tactics always consider: objectives, the type and number of resources available, their condition (work/rest), present and predicted fire behavior, and weather conditions.

LCES Identification and mitigation of risk must be considered in all strategic and tactical planning prior to initiation of action.

Fire Suppression Interpretations from Flame Length	
Flame Length	Interpretations
Less than 4'	Fires can generally be attacked at the head or flanks by firefighters using hand tools. Handline should hold fire.

4' to 8'	Fires are too intense for direct attack on the head with hand tools. Handline cannot be relied on to hold the fire. Bulldozers, engines, and retardant drops can be effective.
8' to 11'	Fires may present serious control problems: torching, crowning, and spotting. Control efforts at the head will probably be ineffective
over 11'	Crowning, spotting, and major fire runs are probable. Control efforts at the head of the fire are ineffective.

Direct Attack This strategy is conducted directly on the flaming edge of the fire. Direct attack must start with an anchor point.

Direct Attack	
Advantages	Disadvantages
There is minimal area burned. No additional area is intentionally burned.	Firefighters can be hampered by heat, smoke, and flames.
Safest place to work. Firefighters can usually escape into the burn area.	Control lines can be very long and irregular, because the line follows edge of fire.
Full advantage is taken of burn out areas.	Firefighters may accidentally spread burning material across line.
May reduce the possibility of the fire moving into the crowns of trees or brush.	Doesn't take advantage of natural or existing barriers.
Eliminates the uncertain elements of burning out or backfiring.	Usually more mopup and patrol.

Indirect Attack This strategy is used when a direct attack is not possible or practical. The use of natural barriers, roads, fuel type changes, etc. helps to establish control lines as part of burn out or backfiring operations. Effective strategy when fire behavior is intense and/or fire fighting resources are scarce. Indirect attack must start with an anchor point.

Indirect Attack	

Advantages	Disadvantages
Can locate line along favorable topography.	More acreage will be burned.
Takes advantage of natural or existing barriers	May be dangerous to firefighters, because they are some distance from the fire and can't observe it.
Firefighters work out of smoke and heat.	Fire may cross line before it is fired.
More time to construct line.	Burning out may leave unburned islands.
Allows line to be constructed in lighter fuels.	Brings into play the dangers of burning out or backfiring.
May be less danger of slopovers.	Fails to take advantage of line that has already burned out.
Firefighters can drop back from the fire's edge, getting away from the smoke and heat.	Fails to take advantage of fireline that has burned out on its own.
Can cut fireline across pockets and fingers.	Burned area is not readily available as a safety zone.
May be able to place line in lighter fuels.	
Usually shorter and straighter line.	

Hotspotting Hotspotting is used to hold the active areas on a fire's edge long enough to allow line construction operations to encompass the area. Emphasis must be placed on the use of viable anchor points, escape routes and safety zones to maintain LCES.

Cold Trailing Cold trailing means the firefighters are working along a partially dead line. They are inspecting the black line for heat, constructing line where needed, and mopping up hotspots. Cold trailing is used to reduce unnecessary disturbance to the environment.

Mopup To extinguish burning material that may cause a fire to spread beyond the control lines.

Mopping Up a Fire	
Priorities	Guidelines
Start work on each portion of line as soon as possible.	Start with the most dangerous line first. Work from the fireline toward the center of the fire. Small fires are totally extinguished. On larger fires, mop up a minimum of 100 feet, or to such a distance that nothing will blow, roll, or spot across the line.
Secure and extinguish burning materials.	Arrange burning fuels so they cannot roll across the line. Spread smoldering fuels and apply water so they will cool. Scatter fuels away from the line.
Deal with special hazards inside the line.	Fall snags; extinguish logs and stumps. If you can't fall the snag, clear around the base, so that burning material will not fall into flammable fuels.
Deal with special hazards outside the line.	Move slash back, away from the fireline. Fall snags and cover with dirt. If stumps are close to the line, cover them with dirt.
Reinforce the fireline.	Widen and clean the fireline. Reinforce any undercut line. Burn out or cold trail islands. Dig out roots that cross under the fireline. Feel for hot material along the fireline.
Check for spot fires.	Constantly check for spot fires, especially downwind from the fireline. Check heavier fuels (logs, snags, slash, etc.) for smoldering material.

For additional information on strategic and tactical guidelines and principles, see the NWCG *Fireline Handbook* (PMS 410-1, NFES 0065), Chapter 1, Initial Attack and Chapter 5, Safety, and the *Incident Response Pocket Guide* (PMS-461, NFES 1077).

Managers Local Incident Debriefing

Debriefing Standards

The criterion found in **Appendix K** emphasize factors that are critical for ensuring safe and efficient wildland fire suppression, and are examples for managers to use in their review of incident operations and incident commanders.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Agency Specific Directions

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Policy stated complies with FWS Service Manual 095 FW 3 *Wildland Fire Management, Fire Management Handbook* Chapter 3.

U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Agency Specific Directions

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"Field Office" to be replaced by "National Forests".

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"It is Forest Service policy for"