



International Association of Fire Chiefs

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Transcript of the Presentation to the Wildland Fire Leadership Council

**National Fire Plan Conference
New Orleans, Louisiana
January 14, 2003**

Last month the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) and the International Association of Wildland Fire (IAWF) took a major step toward achieving a higher level of local government collaboration in dealing with the growing urban interface fire problem.

From December 4-6, 2002, our organizations jointly presented "Wildfire 2002 - Surviving the Interface Danger Zone," a new style of conference that drew a diverse mix of 400 local, state and federal wildland fire professionals. This was the first conference ever to draw a national audience of local fire department officials, state agency representatives, and members of the Federal wildland fire services, all together under one roof, to address the National Fire Plan and other wildland fire issues.

It was no accident that the values of cooperation and teamwork, which are at the core of the National Fire Plan, also provided the over-arching theme of the conference.

The conference prompted many success stories from presenters, students and vendors. We cannot take all of the credit, however, and would like to recognize the substantial contributions made to the success of the meeting by Larry Hamilton from BLM, Tim Hartzell from DOI, Jerry Williams from the US Forest Service and Jim Hubbard from the National Association of State Foresters. These leaders exhibited the true spirit of cooperation while educating and informing local government fire service leaders about federal policies and the many challenges we all face in addressing the interface problem. From our perspective, these wildland fire service leaders seemed to enjoy and benefit from interacting with local fire department and state government officials. In short, we feel that we began building a coordinated effort to address the many challenges we face in coming years.

For us, the conference provided our leadership and our members with enthusiasm and momentum, and we need to keep that momentum going. Our organization is listed as a key collaborator under each of the four goals identified in the Ten Year Implementation Plan, and we are eager to begin making progress to meet the responsibilities we have been given.

The implementation plan provides dozens of specific tasks that need to be accomplished, and there is a critical time path identified for completion of each item. Many of the individual tasks are in themselves complex undertakings; they require detailed planning, research and analysis. Most will require the collaboration of diverse organizations and individuals, and significant time and travel will be required (in our view this is absolutely necessary since involving stakeholders is the only way to ensure broad acceptance and eventual implementation of the plan.)

Coordinating the activities of all the various players assigned to the dozens of tasks is a tremendous undertaking. We assert that additional personnel need to be specifically assigned to ensure that the implementation plan progresses along its identified schedule, to coordinate with the stakeholders who are involved, and to provide continuous feedback and updates to senior staff and to the Council. Furthermore, it will be necessary to identify sources of funding for participating organizations to participate, particularly as it becomes necessary to travel to meetings and to accomplish specific implementation steps.

The involvement of the IAFC serves a good example. Our members, who are seasoned experts, are ready to cooperate. But in order to see this effort successfully completed, we need direction, we need to know the rules, we need reimbursement for our expenses, and we need to know the game plan.

We must address the fact that current federal fire service policies are being implemented that may place an unplanned financial burden on local government for structural fire protection during a federally involved wildland incident. Some local fire agencies are being compelled to accept costs during this last fire season that in the past were accepted by the Federal Fire agency hosting the incident. In spite of the cooperative language contained within the National Fire Plan and The Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy this federally based position came as a surprise that was not discussed with local fire service leaders. We need to consider the timing of this position given the current condition of our forests and the threat they will continue to pose until such time as forest health can be restored. The IAFC is of the opinion that this issue warrants resolution prior to the 2003 fire season. We do not want to undermine the working relationships with local government that is so critical to suppressing a majority of the fires that burn on co-mingled lands during initial attack.

When considering the three documents, including the National Fire Plan, the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and the Ten Year Strategy, we find inconsistencies and we are confused about the relationship that these documents describe between the federal agencies and local government.

The International Association of Fire Chiefs is committed to working with the WFLC and with the various other stakeholders to implement both the spirit and the specific goals of the National Fire Plan. We have an outstanding blueprint for action in the form of the Ten Year Implementation Plan and we stand ready to do our part to make it a success.

Thank you,

Fire Chief Tom Kuntz, Co-Chair
IAFC Wildland Fire Program
Red Lodge, Montana

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IAFC Wildland Fire Program
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Comments on Fiscal Responsibilities for Structure Protection in the Wildland Urban Interface

WFLC / NFP Meeting
January 13, 2002
New Orleans, Louisiana

Current federal land management agency fire service policies regarding fiscal responsibility for structure protection are placing an unplanned (and possibly inappropriate) financial burden on local governments. This occurs during federal wildland fires when local fire agencies are being compelled to accept fiscal responsibility for structural fire protection. In the past these costs were borne, without question, by the federal fire agencies managing the incident. Because of the cooperative tone of the current language in both the National Fire Plan and the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy these decisions to move fiscal responsibility, came as a surprise to local and state government fire officials. Given the current issues regarding forest health (fuel buildup in the interface areas of the western United States), and the threat this continues to pose, we question the timing of these decisions.

This issue warrants resolution prior to the 2003 fire season. Failure to resolve this issue will undermine the working relationships that the federal fire agencies have with local government, and may impact fire response by local government to fires on federal land in the initial attack phase.

During the 2002 fire season several state and local government fire agencies were surprised to learn that some federal fire agencies were implementing an unknown federal policy that shifted most, if not all, fiscal responsibility for structure protection occurring on federal interface fires to local government.

When federal fire agencies were asked about this apparent change in policy, the response referenced the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and the subsequent 2001 review, which states:

“Structural Fire suppression is the responsibility of the Tribal, State, or Local Governments. Federal agencies may assist with exterior structural protection activities under formal fire protection agreements that specify the mutual responsibilities of the partners, including funding” (Chapter 3, page 23).

The attempt to implement this Structure Protection Policy by the federal agencies has generated confusion for local fire service agencies that routinely respond mutual aid with federal fire agencies. The coordination and cooperation between local government and their federal partners professed in the National Fire Plan and 10 Year Implementation Plan is critical to the overall emergency response system used for wildland and structural fire protection.

Considering the condition of fuels in the wildland interface, the extreme burning conditions exhibited in the 2002 fire season and the need to increase fire suppression emergency response effectiveness at the federal and local level, we feel urgency in resolving the cost shifting policy. The IAFC respectfully requests the name of the federal lead player or agency that we need to work with to develop a plan to suspend implementation of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy related to passing structural fire protection cost to the local fire service for wildland fires that occur as a part of a federal response.



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Concept Paper Regarding Joint WFLC / IAFC Locally Sponsored National Fire Plan Workshops

Part of the challenge in developing long term collaborative strength and coordinated support of federal fire response policies by local fire service is to better inform the local fire service about what the future fire planning and policy network is all about. Most local fire agencies do not understand the powers and implications of the federal plans and policies that exist. This is especially a problem when local fire service borders federal land and/or participates in mutual aid response. With that in mind we propose the following:

The Wildland Fire Leadership Council in collaboration with the International Association of Fire Chiefs could facilitate outreach workshops with selected local government fire agencies that have federal lands bordering local fire service protected areas.

The purpose of these workshops would be to gauge the level of understanding of local and federal response needs and to exchange insights between local and federal fire forces across the country. We propose that the agenda for the workshops include the following:

- a. Familiarize local government wildland interface fire agencies with:
 - i. The National Fire Plan
 - ii. The Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy
 - iii. The 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan.
- b. Solicit comments and constructive recommendations related to the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy.
- c. Promote the development of pre-incident planning of fire suspension actions between federal and local government fire agencies including but not limited to the identification of thresholds at which the local government resources would be come overwhelmed by the approaching wildland fire.
- d. Assist with the development of a template that can be used by local government fire agencies to develop agreements with federal fire agencies for sharing resources during initial attack on mutual threat fires.

Upon the conclusion of the outreach workshops a summary of results, including the local government fire agency's recommendations, will be presented to the Wildland Fire Leadership Council for review and utilization.