



# POSITION STATEMENT

## **Utilization of COVID-19 Resources for Local Planning and Response to Wildland Fires**

The International Association of Fire Chiefs, through its Wildland Fire Policy Committee, adopts the position on *Utilization of COVID-19 Resources for Local Planning and Response to Wildland Fires*.

### **Background**

In December 2019, a novel coronavirus (COVID-19) was first detected in Wuhan, Hubei Province, People's Republic of China, and has now spread globally. Across the U.S., public health authorities have issued significant restrictions on public gatherings and implemented social distancing practices. COVID-19 is generally thought to be spread from person-to-person in close contact and through exposure to respiratory droplets from an infected individual.

In recent years, the interagency wildland fire community has recognized that wildland fires occur year-round. There are, however, times of the year when resources are more engaged and oftentimes spread very thin; we are approaching that time in the U.S. With the intent to sustain a viable, safe and effective wildland fire management workforce (federal, state, local, tribal and private resources) during the COVID-19 pandemic, a preliminary measure is to establish common infection screening protocols utilized across the wildland fire community. The Fire Management Board with the concurrence of the Fire Executive Council, created the COVID-19 Wildland Fire Medical and Public Health Advisory Team to address medical and public health-related issues specific to interagency administration of mission critical wildland fire management functions within the context of this pandemic. To that end, this group developed an interim standard operating procedure which has been recommended for immediate adoption and utilization by wildland fire personnel at duty stations and wildland fire incidents to reduce the risk of disease through common screening protocols.

### **Position**

The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), through its Wildland Fire Policy Committee, recognizes that the interagency wildland fire community is committed to preventing the spread of COVID-19 and promoting the health and wellness of all wildland firefighters and support personnel. As such, consistent and continual monitoring of personnel is the first step in preventing the movement of potentially infected individuals and the spread of COVID-19. To that end, the IAFC recommends that all local jurisdictions establish protocols and policies consistent with recommended standards, and that resources which might participate in interagency wildland fire response use the Interim Screening Protocol and Tool created by the COVID-19 Wildland Fire Medical and Public

Health Advisory Team which is linked below. This protocol establishes interim standard operating procedures and protocols to appropriately manage potential COVID-19 infection and reduce risk.

### **Planning Considerations for Local Wildland Fires**

In addition to following the Interim Screening Protocol, the IAFC recommends that leadership consider the following topics:

#### **Pre-incident:**

- Plan for self-sufficiency (self-screening, hygiene, food)
- Confirm mutual aid partners have capacity/willingness to support plan
- Provide community education regarding modified evacuation plans and the need for effective defensible space due to potential lack of firefighting resources
- Modify Red Flag Fire Weather Warning public education. Focus on increased precautions during Red Flag Warning due to resource constraints and the need to have alternatives to public evacuation centers

#### **Response:**

- Plan to be self-sufficient with proper personal protective equipment and sanitizing supplies for several days
- Plan to coordinate with local health officials if incident requires establishing a fire camp or incident base
- Consider using the "module as one concept", avoid mixing crews from different stations/shifts
- Consider how social distancing/face covering can and will be used on incidents
- Consider modified briefings, use radio or video briefing, if in person, assemble smallest group necessary
- Consider modified tactics, use aggressive initial attack to keep fire small, consider patrol vs. 100% mop-up, rapidly de-escalate incident to avoid need for food lines, fire camps, etc.
- Consider risk vs. benefit of distancing in vehicles vs. responding with crew split between multiple vehicles. Response with multiple vehicles may increase risk and decrease situational awareness
- Plan for longer rehab due to need to decontaminate vehicles and equipment

#### **Evacuation:**

- Consider need for more evacuation centers to maintain social distancing
- Plan for additional hygiene/social distancing provisions within shelters
- Consider rapid de-escalation of evacuation to minimize sheltering needs

#### **References:**

[NWCG Infectious Disease Guidance for Wildland Fire Incident Management Teams](#)

[Fire Management Board 20-006a Interim Screening Protocol and Tool](#) (PDF)

**Submitted by the IAFC Wildland Fire Policy Committee**  
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