



April, 2020

Recommended Mitigations for Wildland Fire Response During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Wildland fire suppression activities require a level of professionalism and attention to detail as well as a responsibility to one's self and family to come home safe at the end of every assignment. COVID-19 presents an added exposure risk and requires additional protection measures. Taking practical and effective measures to avoid exposure to the virus, in order to keep our workforce healthy and productive, is our goal.

Review and use of the Center for Disease Control's "How to Protect Yourself" guidelines is located online: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/prevention.html>

General Behaviors and Personal Hygiene

- Adopt an "insulate the module as one" mentality. It is crucial for modules to stay healthy as a unit, so think of each module (engine, IA or RX, etc.) as one individual/family unit. Keep in mind, exposing yourself is also exposing your module and your family. Insulate and protect yourselves. Practice social distancing to a minimum of six feet from individuals outside of your unit.
- Monitor each other. Watch for symptoms and isolate as necessary <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/symptoms.html>. A mentality of "I will be fine and I can push through it" may expose others to the virus, which may eventually expose their family as well. Close proximity, when necessary, is not an issue if everyone within the unit is healthy.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks. If surfaces are dirty, clean them by using detergent and soap and water prior to disinfection. Most common EPA-registered household disinfectants will work. Options include: bleach solution of 1/3 cup bleach per gallon of water, alcohol solution of at least 70% alcohol (for surfaces)
- Most importantly, impress on your fire family, personal responsibility off hours to reduce the potential to bring the virus into the workplace. Provide clear leader's intent and expectations of fire staff on their off-duty responsibilities to protect themselves and their crews from exposure. This should include following CDC guidelines: avoiding restaurants, bars and crowds larger than 10 people, self-monitoring, reporting potential exposure, and staying home from work if exposed or sick.

Home Unit – General Preparedness Activities

- Physical training (PT) should be conducted outdoors rather than using indoor training facilities. Stagger PT time for modules if necessary and consider PT at home. Disinfect showers between uses.
- Daily briefings, meetings, and after action reviews should be completed outdoors while practicing social distancing.
- Implement measures such as flexible work sites and when possible, flexible work hours, while still maintaining appropriate response times. Consider telework options for modules once preparedness activities are complete, if local fire conditions allow.
- Clean work areas and vehicles frequently and between operation periods. Make necessary cleaning supplies readily available. Institute a cleaning period each day to disinfect surfaces in work and dormitory facilities.

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- Work with your Unit Line Officer to determine positions/personnel who should be partitioned from other personnel, to protect them, and ensure reduced threat of spread. These partitioned personnel and facilities should be identified and no one outside those identified personnel should be allowed in those facilities/areas.

Fire Response

- Consider utilizing an increased number of vehicles to allow more separation within each vehicle. Avoid sharing personal protective equipment, such as flight helmets, clothing, gloves, sunglasses, etc. Keep in mind, driving is still one of our highest-risk activities.
- Disinfect mobile and handheld radios after use. See CDC's recommendations for cleaning and disinfection at above link.
- Order and carry additional cache items: MREs, PPE, water bottles, bottle water, etc. Consider the continued consumption of MREs during extended attack, rather than obtaining food from vendors and/or restaurants. Clean and disinfect coolers daily. Be the only one to handle your own food and water.
- During assignments, request to stay out of fire camps and incident command posts (ICPs). Limit close interaction with other incident personnel. Limit hand to hand distribution of items such as incident action plans (IAPs). Consider electronic copies and taking personal notes.
- Consider radio or remote briefings for incoming resources, instead of individual briefings.

Incident Command Posts (ICPs) and Fire Camps

- Order and provide extra portable toilets (sani-huts) and handwashing stations whenever possible. Order these as early as possible. When possible, request additional cleaning of sani-huts and handwashing stations, and ensure hand sanitizer is available at all times. Consider use of camp crews to assist in more frequent disinfecting of units.
- Order additional sanitizing and disinfection supplies: hand sanitizer, bleach, buckets, paper towels. Consider creating cleaning/sanitizing kits utilizing 5 gallon buckets and necessary supplies, to be available for responding resources.
- Avoid handling items touched by others: community coolers, fruit boxes, batteries, etc.

Consider all actions have inevitable impacts to our current situation. Take appropriate safety measures when training for, responding to, and taking action on incidents. You are your best line of defense against this current pandemic. Resources may be limited at times and your continual efforts to protect yourself and your crew will help keep you healthy and available to respond throughout this fire season.

Links and Attachments

- NWCG Infectious Diseases Guidelines for Wildland Fire Incident Management Teams
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2020-02/infectious-diseases-guidelines-for-imts.pdf>
- Department of the Interior Pandemic Influenza Plan
https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/doi-pandemic-influenza-plan-30nov07-508-compliant_0.pdf
- The Pandemic Response and Preparedness Plan for the Federal Wildland Fire Agencies.
https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2020-02/dec_2013_amended_final_flu_resp_plan_12-06-2013_clean.pdf

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