



Eastern Area Coordinating Group **Operations Working Team** **Briefing Paper**

Date: June 17, 2013

Subject: Proposed Standards for All-Hazard Sawyer Modules in the Eastern Area

Issue: Currently there are no national standards for Sawyer Modules. Establishing minimum standards for Sawyer Modules would improve safety for workers in storm-damaged clearing operations.

Background: In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, the Eastern Area employed more than 40 wildland fire crews – most of which were used for “chainsaw crews” in road clearing operations. While Type-1 and Type-2 hand crews do have minimum standards for sawyers, the skill levels vary widely – and may not even include “B Sawyers”. Type-1 and Type-2 fire crews are designed and organized for quickly moving through naturally-occurring wildland fuels; to cut and dig fire lines.

“Chainsaw crews” working after hurricanes, tornadoes, ice storms, etc. are exposed to countless numbers of hazard trees, which have been subjected to severe wind, violent bending / twisting and breakage. During falling and bucking operations in storm damaged timber, the complexity of saw operations increases exponentially. During storm clearing operations, almost every tree can be expected to be under some form of tension/compression and ready to explode if improperly cut by an inexperienced sawyer. While the timber may not be overly large in diameter (generally < 24” DBH), they usually present a complex falling / bucking scenario.

The general response in these types of operations has been to order T-1 / T-2 fire crews, which are generally too large to move around in congested areas; and do not come with more than 3-or 4 qualified sawyers. The result is often too many people working on an incident – with too few saws – and/or insufficient skills needed for complex falling and bucking work. An alternative to ordering fire crews is to order “Sawyer Modules”. However, as there are currently no national standards for ordering Sawyer Modules in ROSS, that requires the ordering units to create the standards and build the modules as they are ordered in ROSS.

Recommendation: A solution to making sure the ordering unit gets the right resource with the skills and equipment needed for the job is to frontload the system by establishing minimum standards for Falling Modules. The Operations Working Team (OWT) has researched this issue and with the cooperation of subject matter experts, respectfully requests the EACG to review and consider implementing the following minimum standards for Sawyer Modules in the EA:

Eastern Area All-Hazard Sawyer Module Standards

- Module Size - 2 – 4 personnel
- Qualifications
 - Designated Module Leader
 - Minimum of 2 Fallers (Agency qualified for complex falling operations or THSP B or C Sawyer)

