



State of Utah

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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UTAH DIVISION OF FORESTRY, FIRE AND STATE LANDS COVID-19 OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE

Subject: Operational Guidance

Goal: Mitigate COVID-19 virus transmission, to the extent possible, for wildfire personnel while providing mission critical fire management resources for local and national fire response.

Introduction

COVID-19 is a very serious, highly contagious virus that is impacting our lives on a daily basis, including the way we manage wildfire. Wildland firefighters are considered mission critical to the local and national fire effort. Because of this, we will bring on our FFSL fire crews as regularly scheduled. This poses significant challenges to social distancing, to the point it may be impossible. The following guidelines are intended to mitigate risk of exposure but will not eliminate all risk. Employees, particularly firefighters, need to know that their risk of exposure to COVID-19 may be higher than the general public. This is an evolving situation and updates to this guidance should be expected.

Operational Best Practices Amidst COVID-19

General Behaviors

1. Adopt an “insulate the module as one” mentality
 - a. Due to the nature of our business, wildland firefighters are often unable to maintain recommended social distances while accomplishing our mission. It is crucial for modules to stay healthy as a unit, so think of each module--e.g., engine module, IA or Rx module, etc.--as one individual/family unit. This is no different from our desire to insulate our families at home from COVID-19. We must also insulate our fire family.
2. Monitor ourselves and each other
 - a. Watching for symptoms and taking your temperature regularly are the best methods for identifying the virus early. Since close proximity is inherent with firefighting we must ensure that everyone on the crew is healthy.



3. Insulate mission-critical fire staff
 - a. Identify essential fire staff and reduce potential exposure from the general public, office staff, and nonessential partners. This may mean restricting certain areas and creating physical separation between modules, support functions and other mission essential functions. Consider designating restrooms, breakrooms and traditionally shared workspaces for specific functions, if practical.
4. Set clear expectations for personnel off hours
 - a. Most importantly, impress upon your fire family each individual's personal responsibility during off hours to reduce the potential of bringing the virus into the workplace. Provide clear leader's intent and expectations of fire staff about their off-duty responsibilities to protect themselves and, therefore, their crew 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 – Preparedness Activities

1. Physical training
 - a. Conditioning should be conducted outdoors, whenever practical, rather than using indoor training facilities. Stagger PT time for modules if necessary. Maintain social distancing in shared locker rooms. Ensure shared PT facilities are regularly and thoroughly cleaned and sanitized.
2. Daily readiness activities
 - a. Operational briefings, safety meetings, weather reports and staffing plans should be done in well ventilated facilities or, preferably, outdoors when practical.
3. Telework
 - a. Consider telework options for modules once preparedness activities are complete, if local fire conditions allow.
 - b. Consider alternative methods to present and attend training (online, virtual, etc.).
4. Clean and sanitize work areas regularly
 - a. Clean work areas and vehicles frequently and between operational periods.
 - b. Make necessary cleaning supplies readily available.

Home Unit – Elevated Fire Danger Activities

1. Reduce Exposure
 - a. Consider staggered shifts for different modules, dispatchers and support staff. Avoid crew member swaps or rotations if at all possible. Maintain the "insulate the module as one" mentality.
2. Reduce human-caused fire starts

- a. Fire managers should work closely with local and state leadership to evaluate local fire conditions and consider implementing fire restrictions and area closures to reduce the potential for human-caused fires.
3. Fire detection
 - a. Patrols should be done by module to ensure they remain insulated.
4. Prevention
 - a. Consider virtual or remote prevention activities and messaging. Increase fire information and signage. Ensure fire reporting information is well posted at visitor centers and other common gathering areas.

Initial Attack, Fuels Management and Project Work

Initial Attack is the highest priority for investment of resources. We must emphasize the need to catch fires during initial attack and prevent long duration fires.

1. Weigh the risk of responding in multiple vehicles; driving is still one of our highest-risk activities.
2. Consider radio or remote briefings for incoming resources, instead of individual briefings.
3. Do not share PPE, flight helmets, radios or other equipment.
4. Use MREs, single-serve sack or boxed meals instead of food lines. Evaluate drinking water supply options. Don't share cubees if possible.
5. Stock vehicles with disinfecting wipes, hand sanitizer and soap.
6. Provide extra hand washing stations whenever possible.
7. Disinfect vehicles and equipment after each response. Wash PPE after each response.
8. Consider more rest between responses. Typical 2:1 work/rest mitigation may not be enough to keep personnel healthy this year.

Severity

1. Evaluate and pre-identify hotels and food vendors based on cleaning practices and other mitigation efforts.
2. Use single-serve sack or boxed meals, take-out, drive-through, etc., instead of dining in restaurants. Avoid dining in if at all possible.
3. Consider positioning resources in non-typical locations as compared to "normal" or past practices; e.g., perhaps not positioning at the same station as local resources.

Extended Attack/Large Fire

1. Weigh the risk of responding in multiple vehicles; driving is still one of our highest-risk activities.
2. Consider closed camps.
3. Consider non-traditional fire camps with an emphasis on modular separation.
 - a. Eat and brief outdoors and designate larger areas than normal for both.
 - b. Consider eating in shifts with sanitization between shifts. Do not allow lines. Do not allow self-serve eating models.
4. Camps should be designed so crews can maintain separation from each other:
 - a. Consider separate “pods” for each crew, to include sleeping areas, restroom facilities, and eating areas.
 - b. Consider each crew maintaining self-sufficiency.
 - c. If common eating areas must be used, consider eating in shifts and cleaning between shifts. Also consider modifying typical feeding procedures (i.e. no salad bars), use single-serve sack, boxed meals or MREs.
 - d. Utilize remote/radio briefings or expand briefing areas to accommodate 6 foot spacing.
 - e. Order extra handwashing stations and portable restrooms. Consider shower and laundry units.
 - f. Consider if IMT or camp functions can be accomplished remotely.
 - g. Maintain ice chest/cooler cleanliness by cleaning hands prior to use.
 - h. Expectations of regular shower use, when available, by firefighters should be conveyed to personnel.
5. Clean or change PPE often; this is not the year to proudly wear dirty Nomex.
6. Plan shifts to allow for more rest than historical norms. Consider more rest between responses.
7. Plan operations to reduce smoke exposure. This includes significantly limiting mop-up.
8. Emphasize strategies with low resource demand and high likelihood of success.
9. If incidents are more than a day’s drive from the home unit, support and encourage R&R at the incident to reduce responders’ exposure to the virus during travel home and back to the next incident.
10. Strongly encourage self-quarantining, if practical, for firefighters returning from extended attack/large fire support incidents to protect family members from potential exposure.