

Hawley & Cap Fire Lessons Learned

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4/18/2020 I was dispatched to check a smoke report near Clyde Guard Station in the Little Lost River Valley. At the conclusion of the Hawley fire, we were dispatched to another smoke report in Antelope Valley. As far as assignments go, it was straight forward. For learning lessons on how we will approach the upcoming fire season in relations to Covid-19 mitigations, there are several points I would like to share. After the third shift before we went home, we had a very thorough and in-depth discussion amongst the group on what worked well, what didn't, and what challenges we are going to face this upcoming season trying to mitigate Covid-19. I've compiled below several points that came out of our on the line AAR as well as our zone conference call. Some I agree with more than others, but the end product can still be learning lessons for others. Some of these points have been copy and pasted and some have been edited to add clarity.

- National direction needs to come down from the top regarding resource operations. With regards to the other agency modules, there seemed to be a disparity in how modules are operating regarding Covid-19 mitigations. I talked with both the Idaho Falls and Pocatello engines and some said they were teleworking, some said they were not. Both engines told me that they were just instructed to wash there hands more but had not really been given any direction to what specific measures would be taken to mitigate Covid-19. They both agreed that everybody is not on the same page when it comes to what steps would be done this upcoming season. We all agreed that with this pandemic being something nobody has faced before, that there may be a lag time before any real Leaders Intent gets disseminated to the ground.
- Be aware of individual "Perceived Threat." Some individuals might feel herd immunity is inevitable, but others might have a close relative that falls into the at-risk category. Being mindful of some of the things we say and do can keep the focus on protecting ourselves and the community we serve. Regardless of our own individual opinions; we have a job to do.
- "Module of One" concept is the only true way to operate effectively. If all crew members stick to their vehicles and equipment, there shouldn't be a need to constantly wipe down everything that gets touched on an emerging incident. The theory is if we are constantly wiping down hoses, pump throttles, door handles, or any of the other thousand things we cross contaminate; we are more likely to lose focus and situational awareness in a hazardous fire ground. Sticking to the Module of One, essentially everyone is already contaminated, and we share the risk together. At the conclusion of operations, a thorough disinfecting of equipment should occur, not while we are in fire operations.
- Preventative measures can be easily implemented at the station during day-to-day activities, but during an emerging incident or during mop-up like activities; they are harder to implement with so many moving parts in fire operations.
- Radio briefings were conducted and seemed to work just fine with getting information out to the resources. I can see with more complex incidents, and a lot more information to get out, this will be a challenge.

- Currently, we do not have the supplies needed for mitigation of Covid-19. There were limited amounts of hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, masks, and gloves. The supply we had was what we normally carry on the modules. After our zone call, we were notified that there are supplies in the office for our use and we are going to stock the modules accordingly so we may be more prepared for disinfecting the vehicles and ourselves on the next assignment.
- Peer to Peer interactions are a challenge. Our instinct is to greet each other with a handshake and eye contact. There is going to be some time before we are naturally trained to avoid such contact.
- We had all the crews sleep in separate camps on Cap, while on Hawley while using the guard station; we each had our own room. Separating sleeping areas will avoid cross-module contamination.
- Personal and Peer Accountability, there needs to be an emphasis on doing the hard right even when no one is looking and holding each other accountable to not bring contamination into the module.
- COVID19 should not force us to lose focus of what is truly important. The Chief's letter should direct how we conduct business, in all things, not just incident response. We need to keep in mind that our job is to ensure that safety, welfare and unselfish consideration for our own employees and the public is retained to the highest possible degree. Historical events have shown the divided and selfish nature that a population can develop if we allow protocols to come before compassion, patience and understanding. We chose this career because of its fluid nature; we need to keep in mind that certain elements cannot be mitigated or controlled with a flow chart or a matrix. Trust needs to be extended to all as individuals to make our own assessments and to choose to do the right thing. Trust needs to be extended to supervisors to make sound decisions when faced with situation specific challenges. We need to keep in mind that we are all in this together and that specific needs do change. Managers need to consider the needs of employees before the needs of a protocol which fails to cover every situation.