



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

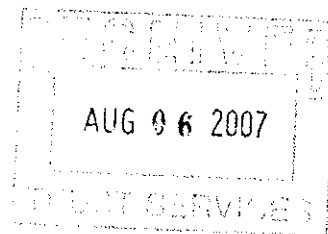
JUL 31 2007

Memorandum

To: Director, National Park Service
Director, Bureau of Land Management
Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs
Director, Fish and Wildlife Service

From: Secretary

Subject: Adopting a Principles-based Approach to Wildland Fire Management



It was 50 years ago, in 1957, that a landmark report was given to the Chief of the USDA Forest Service outlining ways to strengthen the prevention of fire fatalities. From this effort came the 10 Standard Fire Orders, our anchor point for fire suppression safety, and the 13 Watch Out Situations, eventually upgraded to 18 Watch Out Situations. These time-tested principles have served our wildland fire community well and we will continue to use them to evaluate the safety of our actions. The "10 and 18," as they are respectfully referred to, are broad-based principles developed from experience gained on many fires over many years.

Over the last two decades of investigating firefighter fatalities, the wildland fire community has added an extensive list of additional rules to the "10 and 18." The intent was to better prepare firefighters for determining the safest course of action while suppressing fires or protecting communities. Although these rules serve well to guide firefighting actions in most situations, they must not take the place of experienced judgment in quickly changing, extreme, or otherwise unique fire environments. The most effective tool in our arsenal is the experienced firefighter's professional judgment, based on their extensive training and experience, to quickly and safely assess potentially dangerous situations. Only then can they know what the safest, most effective course of action is, based on current and anticipated conditions.

Every emergency fire situation is different and can pose unique challenges. Our firefighters must have the procedural flexibility to take the safest action possible in every situation. Rules designed around a single, specific fire situation cannot be expected to automatically lead to the safest action for every possible situation that our firefighters potentially face.

Rigidly following a rules-based approach to safety often unintentionally discourages critical, judgment-based evaluations from taking place on the fire ground. This will eventually put firefighters and the public at greater risk.

The approach mirrors and complements guidance on Fire Suppression Foundational Doctrine issued by the Chief, U.S. Forest Service on January 26, 2006. The Department of the Interior and the U.S. Forest Service will implement a principles-based approach to wildland management in an integrated manner.

We will soon be issuing a revised Departmental Manual for wildland fire that supports our transition to a more principles-based approach to fire suppression safety. This transition has already begun in the 2007 Interagency Standards for Fire and Aviation Operations (NFES 2724) which is also known as the Red Book. Please read the Fire Operation Doctrine section, pages 01-5 through 01-8, as it lays out the basic principles that guide our fire operations program.

Every fire crew supervisor, fire program leader, and agency administrator should immediately put these principles into practice. Questions regarding the implementation of this policy should be directed to your bureau fire program director, or to Mark Beighley, Director, Office of Wildland Fire Coordination on (202) 606-3211.

cc: Chief, U.S. Forest Service