

Your MID-PLAINS INTERAGENCY
HANDCREW



STANDARD OPERATIONS GUIDE
MID-PLAINS INTERAGENCY CREW

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Purpose

The purpose of the Mid-Plains Interagency Handcrew is to provide, in a collaborative setting, opportunities to build leadership and technical firefighting skills for firefighters.

Defining “Interagency”

There are no lead agencies or organizations. All agencies and organizations participating on the Mid-Plains Interagency Handcrew will receive equal consideration and representation.

Mission Statement

To build and expand both technical and leadership skills for wildland firefighters.

Code of Conduct

Members of the crew are expected to maintain a high standard of honesty, integrity and respect. Crew members will avoid unethical and immoral conduct or any actions, whether on or off duty, which would reflect adversely on their fellow crew members or which would jeopardize the employee’s fitness for duty or effectiveness in dealing with other employees or with the public. A crew member represents not only themselves and their agency, but all individuals and agencies represented within the crew.

Crew Guiding Principals

Service: Our primary goal is to provide a quality resource for the hosting unit to help in meeting its management goal(s) and objectives. This is done recognizing and meeting the needs of people first followed by the needs of the organization above self interest. We will draw on our knowledge, values, and skills to meet this principal.

Growth: We will operate within our areas of competence while developing and enhancing our professional expertise as well as others in our organization. We will continually strive to increase our professional knowledge and skills and to apply them in practice. We will aspire to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession.

Leadership: Leadership is the umbrella in which all action is undertaken. We recognize that leadership is more than supervising or directing action. Leadership is the art of influencing others to change for the benefit of the organization. As such we understand that leadership occurs, necessarily so, at all levels in the organization. Leadership is demonstrated through meeting the principals listed here.

These are the guiding principles for the Mid-Plains Interagency Handcrew member. If all actions, individually or collectively, undertaken follow this intent the potential for success in the resulting outcome will be maximized.

Safety

Protection of property and resources from wildland fire is a concern; safety of our crewmembers and the public is our number one priority. Wildland firefighting is an inherently dangerous occupation and this crew will not accept assignments that cannot be safely completed. To mitigate some of the safety concerns, this crew, as a group of individuals, will strive to be ever mindful of their current environment.

Briefing Checklist

A crew briefing will occur prior to every shift or as needed. Crewmembers will attend and participate in these briefing. The intent of each briefing will cover the following topics:

1. Situation: *Here's what I think we face.*
2. Task: *Here's what I think we should do.*
3. Intent: *Here's why I think that is what we should do.*
4. Concern: *Here's what we should keep our eye on because if that changes, we're in a whole new situation.*
5. Feedback: *Now talk to me. Tell me if you don't understand, cannot do it, or see something I do not.*

Maintaining Reliability and Performance

The wildland fire environment is very fluid and will, despite the best planning efforts, present situations where unpredictable events occur. In order to ensure that reliability and performance continue at a level resulting in a safe and productive manner a state of mindfulness must be created and maintained. Mindfulness is created when firefighters pay more attention to failure than to success. Individual and organizational learning will be fostered and fully supported. Accept that there are things you do not know, look for details that foreshadow a new or changing situation, see old things in new ways and be skeptical of all information received. Fight complacency and understand this is the first step that will result in a critical failure at some point. Expectations can create blind spots and assumptions allowing you not recognize that the situation/environment is changing. Push the responsibility and authority to make decisions down to the lowest level possible in the organization. Look for and value other perspectives and expertise, don't rely on titles. Expect every member of the crew to fully understand and embody the three crew principals. Hesitate in your desire to simplify the situation, understand that the fire environment is complex requiring you attempt to understand all that is happening, directly and indirectly related to your current assignment.

Driving / Travel

Driving is the most dangerous part of our job. The following guidelines will be followed at all times in order to reduce the risk of accidents. NWCG incident driving policy regarding length of travel day and driving times will be followed at all times.

All crewmembers will complete a defensive driving course at minimum every three years. The defensive driving course must be the National Safety Council's (NSC) Defensive Driving course.

Utilize the following guidelines to help mitigate driving risk:

1. Rotate drivers often, at least every two hours.
2. Maintain adequate following distance, greater than two car lengths.
3. Ensure vehicles are kept in good operating condition. Perform preventive maintenance checks daily.
4. Wear seat belts whenever vehicle is in motion.
5. Utilize spotters when backing, or as necessary.
6. Ensure every driver knows where they are going before departure.
7. Drivers will not use a cellular phone or radio.
8. Front seat passengers will stay awake at all times.

Qualifications

All crewmembers will be certified at a minimum as a Firefighter ICS Type 2 under the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) standards. Crewmembers are encouraged to keep a personal record of their training and experience. All taskbooks must be issued by their home unit prior to being evaluated. It is the responsibility of each agency to ensure their personnel meet minimum qualifications for each position in which they are certified. The incident qualification and certification of each individual will be checked by the crewboss prior to mobilization.

Organization

Crewboss:

- The crewboss will have sufficient fire experience to provide capable leadership to the crew. The crewboss is responsible for the overall safety and management of the crew. The crewboss may serve as an IC or fill other positions as needed on an incident, if capable leadership for the crew is identified prior to taking the position. He or she must be qualified as at minimum a Crewboss and Incident Commander Type 4. A desired qualification, but not required, is Firing Boss-FIRB (Type 2 IA crews must be capable of performing firing to include burnout). The Crewboss will also ensure all crewmembers are statused as available in ROSS through Pueblo Interagency Dispatch Center prior to crew being made available.

Assistant Crewboss:

- The assistant will be qualified to supervise the crew in the absence of the crewboss. The assistant may serve as an IC in initial attack configuration and will be qualified as at minimum Crewboss and ICT4 trainee. The Assistant Crewboss will be given first opportunity to work on fireline position taskbooks as they come up.

Squadbosses/Leaders:

- Three Squadbosses provide the day-to-day leadership for assigned squad members. It is their responsibility to keep the crewboss and assistant crewboss informed on all aspects related to safe and effective crew operations. They may also serve as an IC on initial attack fires and will be qualified as at minimum Firefighter ICS Type 1 and ICT 5. The squad bosses serve as the first level of supervision for the crew and as a liaison between assigned squad members and the crew boss.

Firefighters:

- The primary mission for members of the crew is to suppress wildfires or serve in other capacities during any incident. The minimum qualification is Firefighter ICS Type 2.

Sawyers

- Each crew roster will be comprised of a minimum of 3 firefighters agency certified as a Faller B. Four FALB's is preferred.

Trainees:

- The crew supports and recognizes the importance of providing training and leadership opportunities. The crew will strive to have a crewboss trainee and a minimum of 2 squad leader trainees on each assignment. However, if the trainee positions cannot be filled, the crew will remain available. The priority will be to provide trainee opportunities as negotiated for those qualified individuals from agencies or organizations represented on the crew. If no trainees are identified from those agencies or organizations making up the crew, Pueblo Interagency Dispatch Center will be notified of a possible trainee opportunity for any individual within their dispatching zone. It is the trainees' responsibility to initiate and maintain contact with their assigned evaluator during their position evaluation.

Schedule

A crew roster will be set on a two week rotation normally starting in June. All crew members are expected to be available for a full 14 days assignment, not including travel, starting any time during any one two week rotation. While on an assignment, the incident will determine the schedule for the crew.

A firefighter may be placed on a crew roster who is not available for the entire two period only with the approval of the CRWB.

Mobilization/Dispatch

All overhead and crewmembers are expected to be ready to depart from their home unit within 2 hours once they have been notified of a crew dispatch. This is extremely important for a timely and efficient mobilization given the times and distances involved in getting everyone to the identified mobilization point.

If a firefighter cannot be contacted after a reasonable number of attempts as determined by the CRWB that firefighter may be replaced by another individual. The intent of this paragraph is to ensure the crew as a whole can be mobilized within the allotted timeframe.

Prior to be statused as available the assigned CRWB for that rotation will confirm crewmember availability in ROSS through their local dispatch center. Once all crewmembers are statused as "Available-Local" the crew will be statused as available through Pueblo Interagency Dispatch Center (IDC). This will be accomplished by faxing crew manifest to Pueblo IADC where they will confirm individual availability. However the individual crewmember is still primarily responsible for ensuring they are listed as "Available" in ROSS.

The crew will not travel to any assignment without a resource order; this includes a change of assignment during any mobilization. Communication with Pueblo IADC and other hosting dispatch center(s) will be maintained when possible.

Drugs and Controlled Substances

The possession and/or use of controlled substances, in violation of the law, are strictly prohibited while on duty, on government property, in government vehicles, or while in travel status. Any person who violates this policy or who has knowledge of a violation and fails to report it to their supervisor will immediately be removed from their duties on the crew. All crewmembers are encouraged to report personal medication they have been prescribed to their immediate crew supervisor.

Alcohol

No alcohol will be transported in a government vehicle. Any crewmember who reports to work showing signs of intoxication will be subject to disciplinary action. While in travel status, the opportunity to have an alcoholic beverage during off duty hours may arise. In that event the following crew policy applies:

- The crew vehicles will not be used to transport alcohol or to transport people to a place that serves alcohol, unless it is a crew function, i.e. eating at a restaurant as a crew that serves alcoholic beverages.
- The decision to allow consumption of alcohol will be left to the crewboss. Only those crewmembers of legal drinking age will be allowed to consume alcohol. It is encouraged that only when the crew is returning home for demobilization from an assignment that alcohol consumption be allowed. If a crewmember is intoxicated

therefore inhibiting their fitness for duty or jeopardizing the crew code of conduct the following will be the result: Any crewmember who reports to work showing signs of intoxication will be subject to immediate disciplinary action.

Social Media

The use of Social Media is encouraged for crewmembers to communicate with family, friends and each other. However there are two areas of concern. The first is sharing of information/data that is sensitive in nature and is not within your duty to share. The obvious example is of someone's home that has been destroyed by a wildfire you are on. This information needs to be relayed to the home owner and general public through established channels, not through you. The second item of concern you need to be made aware of is that the information/photos you publish on any Social Media site is considered public in nature. This information is NOT PRIVATE and you are accountable for anything you post on a Social Media site.

Mobile Phone Use

Mobile phone use is encouraged as it increases the potential to ensure adequate communication is occurring. Remember that you are still responsible for being fully rested and ready to perform the duties of a wildland firefighter for every operational shift. Spending a considerable amount of time off shift texting and talking on a mobile phone with friends limits your ability to fully perform your duties as a wildland firefighter and will limit the overall capability of the crew. Use of a mobile phone while on shift is generally discouraged unless needed for communication between crew members for incident related topics. In most cases the expectation is that your mobile phone is turned off while you are on shift unless a need has been identified by the CRWB for you to have your phone on. Your focus and mindfulness is limited if you attempt to keep up with texting and Social Media while on the fireline. Additionally consider the potential disturbance you may be causing to other crewmembers. They may be trying to rest/sleep but cannot if you are texting or talking on the phone.

OPERATING A VEHICLE WITH YOUR MOBILE PHONE ON IS NOT ALLOWED.

Smoking/Tobacco Use

Use of all tobacco products will be restricted to those areas where it is allowed. In addition, as policy dictates, use of tobacco in a US Government vehicle is prohibited.

Crew Conduct

When on assignment or a dispatch, the crew's conduct, on and off the clock, fall directly under the supervision and the responsibility of the crewboss. Therefore, the privileges that the crew has are at the crewboss's discretion. Our primary role is to perform in a safe and professional manner. If an incident occurs which jeopardizes the safety or the reputation of the involved agencies or the crew, individual or the entire crew's privileges may be revoked and will result in disciplinary actions for the parties involved.

Physical Fitness Training

Fitness is absolutely vital to your job. Each crewmember is required to have a current red card, which includes passing the arduous rating Work Capacity Test. Crewmembers that are in good shape are more productive, healthier, safer, and tend to receive more enjoyment from fire assignments. Considerable trust is extended to each and every crewmember in regards to physical fitness. Each firefighter must be in good shape BEFORE performing as a crewmember. It cannot be emphasized enough how important physical fitness is to performing the duties of a handcrew and passing the arduous rating Work Capacity Test is the minimum level of fitness required. You owe it to yourself and to your crew to be in the best shape possible, our lives may depend on it.

Wildland firefighting is a very arduous job. Firefighters must be physically fit for the arduous duties associated with wildland firefighting, which may include long hikes over steep and broken terrain, carrying and lifting heavy equipment, digging fire control lines and spraying water on hotspots. Most fires occur during very hot, dry and windy weather conditions that make the job exhausting. If you are tired you lose your ability to focus on the situation you are in. When you lose your ability to focus on the situation accidents will happen.

Uniform

From the first moment of mobilization you will be required to wear a fire department, agency, crew shirt, or a plain, solid color, cotton t-shirt. Once all crew members meet at the mobilization point the required uniform will be fire resistant, nomex, pants and a belt. In addition all crewmembers will wear quality constructed leather lace-up work boots (eight inch tops or taller). Undergarments and socks should be made of non-synthetic materials. In fire camp, during travel, and when visible to the public, the crew must wear a clean t-shirt or sweat shirt as stated above. (Hint: keep a clean crew shirt and pair of nomex pants reserved for travel home). Official crew hats, agency uniform hats, or plain, solid color, base ball style caps are the only hats which will be worn.

Line Gear and Red Bags

It is vitally important that you keep your line gear ready for fire at all times. Your line gear should supply all your needs over the course of the long shifts you will work. On occasion, the crew finds itself in a temporary coyote camp situation. In a coyote camp you will receive no supplies other than what you pack in your line gear. That being said your line gear cannot exceed 25 pounds, without water, because of flight weight restrictions. Because you will work with your pack on, weight should be minimized. Make sure you carry all the required equipment.

The line gear items that are required are listed and described as follows:

- Line gear/fire pack: your pack should be fairly durable, but care should be taken to avoid losing buckles, etc. Do not tie any gear to the outside of your pack. Remember to leave space for your lunch when arranging the items in your pack. Each crewmember will provide their line gear. No standard line gear has been defined but it is recommended that a dark color like navy blue be used.

- Hard-hat with chinstrap: Each hard-hat and harness system should be periodically inspected and replaced if flaws appear or if they have been subjected to a sudden, heavy blow. All crewmembers will wear a white hard hat, which will be provided.
- Leather gloves: Gloves will be required at all times on an incident. An extra pair kept in your line gear is recommended.
- Fire shelter and rigid plastic sheath: You should inspect your fire shelter frequently. It should be immediately replaced if the pull strip becomes damaged, cracks appear (check folds closely), or if excessive abrasion occurs (look for gray dust). Fire shelters should be worn on the belt or in an easily accessible place on the outside of your pack. Avoid sitting or lying on your shelter.
- One-quart canteens (four minimum): You may wish to carry one or two additional canteens, depending on your water needs. To keep your drinking water potable, you should change it every three to four days.
- Headlamp and batteries: Check your headlamp to see that it operates properly. While in your pack you should keep a slip of paper between the battery contacts. This will ensure that your lamp does not get turned on accidentally. You should carry a spare set of fresh batteries in your pack. Most headlamps require four AA batteries.
- M.R.E or comparable ration: You will want this meal for long first shift situations or when we cannot get fed on the fireline. Do not eat your ration without your supervisor's permission. If one MRE is not sufficient for your needs you are responsible for deciding on and carrying what you need above the one MRE requirement.
- Safety glasses or goggles: Prescription glasses with safety lenses are also suitable. Safety glasses will be required when digging line, working with water, operating a chain saw or other activities as required.
- Four fuses-Primarily this is for your safety. This is an excellent way to quickly create a safety or deployment zone. These must be removed from your line gear prior to boarding any aircraft.
- Ear plugs
- Personal first aid kit

In addition, you may want to carry the following items in your line gear:

- Space Blanket
- Rain gear
- Thermal long sleeve shirt
- Wool cap
- High energy snacks
- Extra boot laces
- Spare socks
- Insect repellent
- Watch
- Pocketknife

Red Bag/Travel Bag

Each crew member must have a “red bag.” The red bag should carry enough personal supplies to outfit a crewmember for a minimum of two weeks without doing laundry. Gear may be packed in plastic bags for additional protection. Your name, the agency, and address should be on every red bag. Your red bag will be your home away from home, but keep in mind that items not found on this list might not be reimbursed if lost or stolen.

You will be expected to have the minimum required PPE as listed in Chapter 7 of the Interagency Standards for Fire & Aviation Operations (aka the Red Book). Additionally you make consider bringing the following items:

- Running shoes and PT attire
- \$50 cash or traveler’s checks
- Shorts
- Jeans or sweats
- Swim suit
- Boot grease
- Extra laces
- Stuff sack/laundry bag
- Playing cards, books, etc.
- Prescription medicine
- Spare prescription glasses

You are expected to and are accountable for maintaining all the gear issued to you. Report damaged items to your supervisor. You will be held financially responsible for issued gear that is not returned or damaged due to misuse. Theft, abuse, or unauthorized use of issued property is forbidden.

Communication

Communication is a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of terms, symbols, signs, or behavior.

Opportunities

Input from all crewmembers helps maximize our overall potential and creates a healthy work environment. Opportunities for exchange will be provided during safety meetings, briefings, debriefings, informal meetings, and counseling/evaluation sessions. If you have a concern let your squad leader or the crewboss know as soon as possible. Management cannot deal with a problem they do not know about.

Conflict Resolution

At times it may seem difficult to maintain good relations with all of your fellow crewmembers. Stressful environments, close quarter living and working arrangements, fatigue, competitive spirit, and lack of emotional outlets can all contribute to strained relationships. If you cannot amicably resolve intra-crew personnel conflicts, get help from your supervisor. If your supervisor is the problem go to the next higher authority in the chain of command. Hesitate to go outside the crew for assistance until there are no other options.

Chain of Command

There exists a formal chain of command on the crew. Every employee has one supervisor and except under unusual circumstances, should only receive direction from that one person. The chain of command should also be used for problem solving, expressing concerns and conflict resolution. The chain of command can be referenced at the end of this document using Organizational Charts. Each crewmember, to maximize safety, is expected to know their job, know their immediate supervisor and continually implement LCES. All crew members will be expected and supported to make the best decision possible at all times within the scope of their duties and experience as the situation warrants. Inaction based on “no one in charge being around” will not be tolerated.

Injuries and Illness

Crewmembers will report existing health conditions, allergies (medication, insects, etc.) to their supervisors and the crew EMT’s at the beginning of any dispatch.

Two ten-person first aid kits will be carried with the crew during all work shifts.

Injuries and illness contracted on the job must be reported to the crewboss and documented immediately, no matter how inconsequential they may seem. Without proper attention, little problems can often develop into serious health threats. Compensation for medical treatment is unlikely for injuries that are not documented within 48 hours of the time they were incurred. Reporting of injuries and illness is the responsibility of the individual Firefighter.

After Action Review

A debriefing, or After Action Review, for the entire crew will be conducted immediately after each assignment and/or event. The assigned leader during the assignment or event will lead this exercise in an informal setting, encouraging input on an assessment of what was planned, what actually happened, why did it happen, and what can be done next time. This assessment is not intended to place blame but to provide a framework of individual and organizational learning. The suggested format may be used and is also found in the Interagency Resource Pocket Guide (IRPG):

What was planned?

- Review the primary objectives and expected action plan.

What actually happened?

- Review the day's action:
 - Identify and discuss effective and non effective performance.
 - Identify barriers that were encountered and how they were handled.
 - Discuss all action that were not standard operating procedures, or those that presented safety problems.

Why did it happen?

- Discuss the reasons for ineffective or unsafe performance. Concentrate on WHAT, not WHO, is right.

What can we do next time?

- Determine lessons learned and how to apply them in the future.

Going the Extra Mile

This crew will “go the extra mile” in all dealings with fellow firefighters as well as the public. Be sincere, courteous, and helpful in all your verbal and non verbal communication. Go beyond the expected: fully answer questions, including unasked questions. Be informed: Know what's happening and know where to get timely and accurate information.

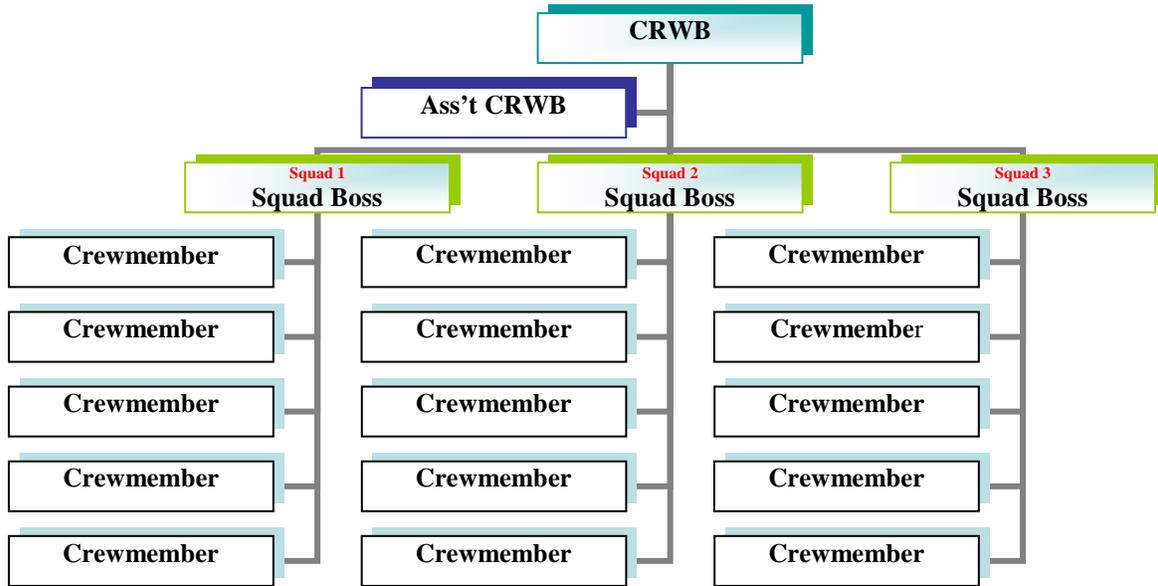
Look sharp/be sharp: Take pride in how you look. Wear the appropriate uniform correctly. Make good first impressions. Remember last impressions are just as important as first impressions. Be courteous and respectful to everyone.

Lead by example. Demonstrate your professionalism every moment of every day. Remember a good Leader must first be a good Follower.

The crew will perform work as a team to the benefit of our customer, striving to meet their every reasonable expectation. What ever the task assigned we will accomplish safely, to the best of our abilities and with an energetic professional attitude.

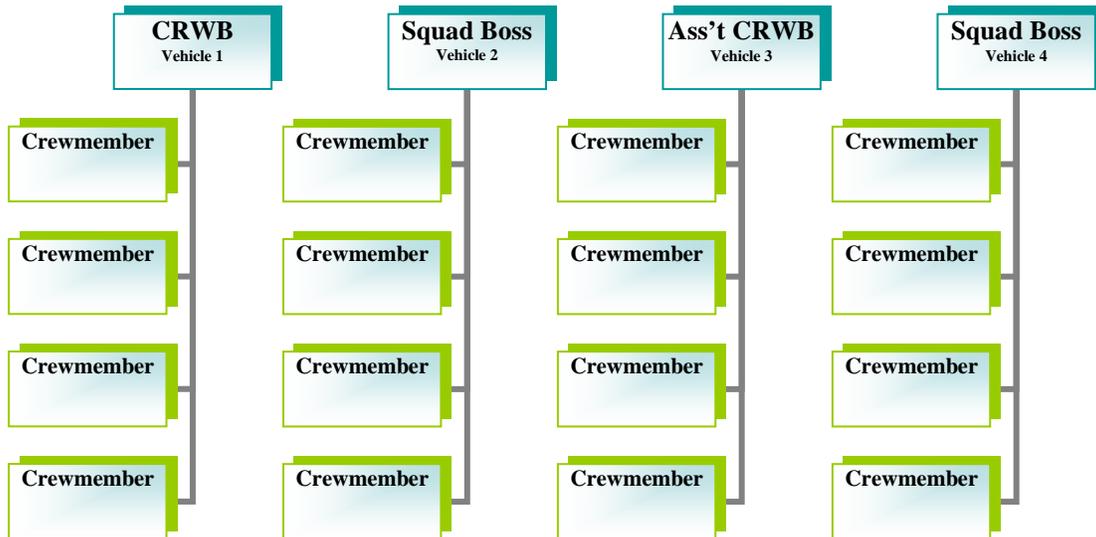
Organizational Charts

Full Crew Configuration



Note: Each squad will have a faller B

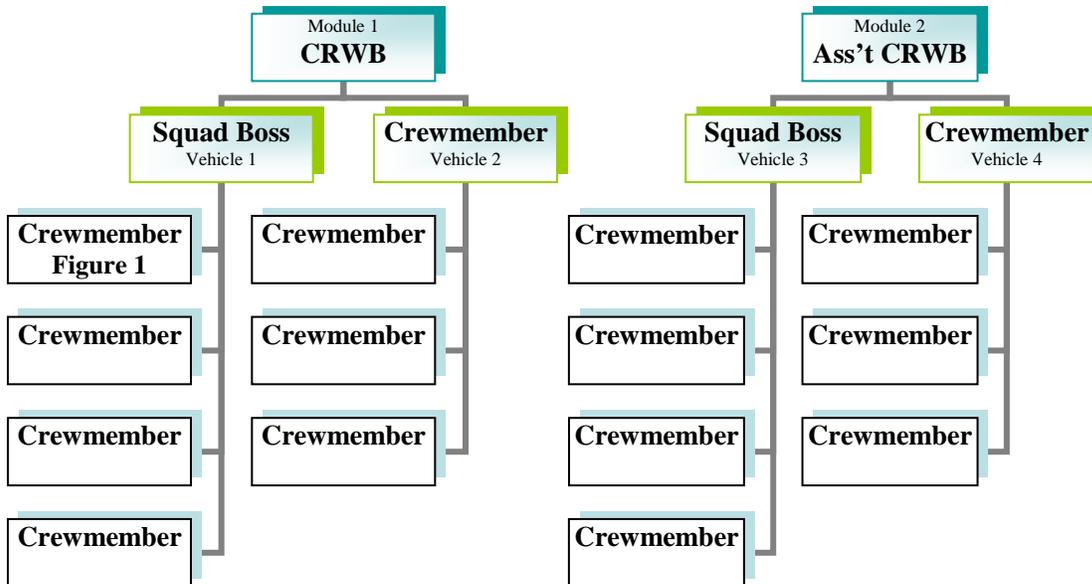
Initial Attack Squad Configuration



Note: We will strive to have a Faller B in each IA squad.

Organizational Charts Con't

Initial Attack Module Configuration



Note: In this configuration we will strive to have one chainsaw per vehicle, however at minimum there will be one chainsaw per module.

Mid Plains Interagency Handcrew Crew Member Availability Agreement

The purpose of this agreement is to clearly define the obligations of the Mid-Plains handcrew overhead personnel and of prospective crew members and their home units, specifically with regards to crew member availability for dispatch.

Crew rosters will be valid for 2 week time periods. Once committed to a roster individuals must be available for dispatch on a fire assignment, which may last up to 14 days exclusive of travel, at any time during that two week time frame that they have listed themselves as available. If the crew is not dispatched during the 2 weeks of availability for a given roster then a new roster will be established for the next two weeks of availability and so on.

Overhead Responsibilities: The Crew Boss and Assistant Crew Boss that are on rotation will be responsible for establishing the crew roster with input from all agencies and units contributing personnel to the crew and submitting the required information to Pueblo IADC. As well as keeping all parties informed of changes in crew status or contact information.

Crew Member and or Home Unit Responsibilities: Crew members will be available for **dispatch** on a fire assignment, which may last up to 14 days exclusive of travel, at any time during the 2 weeks covered by a roster. Supervisory approval is a requirement for crew member participation. It will be the responsibility of the individual crewmember and their supervisor to inform the crew overhead immediately should they become unavailable for any reason. In this event it will be the responsibility of the home unit to supply a replacement crewmember for the remainder of the 2 week roster.

Once committed to a roster if a crewmember becomes unavailable for any reason barring a family emergency, **AND** does not **IMMEDIATELY** inform the crew boss or other crew overhead of the situation then that individual will not be considered for future assignments with the crew. It is vital to fulfill your commitment to the crew during your two-week rotation. Your decisions will directly affect the entire crew.

Crew Member Signature Date

Supervisors' Signature Date