



Equipment Technology Committee

To: Wildland Fire Personnel

Date: 04/25/2013

Subject: Restrictions on use of propane heaters in enclosed spaces

As stated on page 8 in the recently released Wildland Fire Incident Management Field Guide, PMS 210, “Portable propane heaters are not to be used inside tents, yurts, or other enclosed spaces.” These include National Fire Equipment System (NFES) 6139 or NFES 6187 heaters. This letter is meant to draw attention to that statement and provide some additional information to assist field personnel in meeting the needs for livable workspaces on incidents.

A technical review conducted by the San Dimas Technology and Development Center (SDTDC) confirmed that none of the current models of propane heaters used by the National Interagency Support Caches (NISC) are safe to use in enclosed spaces, such as tents, under typical operating environments on incidents, because CO emissions are likely to exceed the permissible exposure limit recommended by Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH). Additional market research conducted by SDTDC concluded there are no portable propane heaters currently on the market that provide an acceptable level of safety for indoor use.

It is important to ensure that all incident personnel are aware of the potential hazards associated with the use of propane heaters and the restriction against their use in enclosed spaces. To ensure the proper use of propane heaters and to address the needs for alternate heat sources on incidents, the following steps are being taken:

- 1) A safety notice is being developed and will be distributed to the field.
- 2) All propane cylinders in the National Fire Equipment System are being labeled “not for indoor use”.
- 3) The NFES Committee, with support from the Forest Service Technology and Development program, is developing a plan for a long-term solution for safely heating wall tents and other structures on incidents.
- 4) Incident Management Teams need to be aware of work conditions and plan ahead for heating tents and yurts. They should consider options such locating some personnel in trailers or buildings, on or off-site, such as schools, where heat is provided.

- 5) A list of short-term options has been developed for use during the 2013 fire season to ensure that livable workspaces are available at fire camps, spike camps and Incident Command Posts. It is important to be aware of and plan ahead for use of alternative heating sources. The list of options accompanies this letter.

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