

1. INTRODUCTION and DECISION MAKING

The purpose for this guide, with a brief discussion on the process of decision making, avoidance of decision errors and guide to success.

1. Introduction and Decision Making

A. Purpose

The “Agency Administrator Guide for Wildland Fire Decision Making” has been developed for agency administrators for managing a large wildland fire incident in which a national or geographic area incident management team will be or is assigned. This guide is a compilation of tools and information that is intended to help the agency administrator through the wildland fire decision process. This guide is not intended to address the management of wildland fire use events.

There is no substitution for preparation to assure a successful outcome should one have the unfortunate opportunity to experience large wildland fire situation on the home unit. There are several sections within the guide to add local information such as fire management plans, key contact lists and forest plan direction. Another step is to pre-arrange with a neighboring agency administrator or Fire Management Officer to be the lead on preparing the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis. Both of these individuals on the home unit will already have their hands full.

Several decision gates have to be recognized and addressed in a timely and sequential manner in order to redeem the full range of responsibilities you hold when an unwanted wildland fire occurs on your unit. The following chart outlines the various decision gates through which the agency administrator will pass in recognizing an emerging large wildland fire incident and providing management and oversight of the objectives that have been set.

Agency Administrator Decision Gates in Wildland Fire Management

[1] Ensure safety in ongoing management at the local level: Be sure your initial attack forces are trained, equipped, and supervised for safe engagement on all fires.

[2] Recognition of emerging incident: Stay informed of initial attack activity on your unit, *monitor* severe fire weather and fire behavior conditions, *notice* Red Flag Warnings, *watch out* for extended attack, escaped fire, and serious incidents within the incident. Be sure that incidents in transition are being properly managed.

[3] Notify and assemble key people to assess, analyze, and make decisions: When it becomes obvious that you need to do something, do it, don't expect a deteriorating situation to fix itself. With an extended attack or escaped wildland fire, be sure the fire staff is kept informed. If you must begin the WFSA process, get the right people assembled fast.

[4] Inform and Involve, prepare for the media: Be sure the public affairs officer is aware of the emerging situation and provided with facts about the wildland fire and your plans to manage it. Take steps to make your employees aware of what is going on and how they may be involved. Inform media, key publics and government officials.

[5] Develop the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA): Organize for development of the WFSA, assemble the information, documents, and intelligence you will need to complete the analysis, and identify a preferred alternative for managing the wildland fire.

[6] Complete an Incident Complexity Analysis: Identify the issues affecting this wildland fire and your strategy and objectives for it, and determine the kind of incident management organization you need.

[7] Order the Incident Management Team (IMT): Based on your assessment of incident complexity and the objectives you have established for managing the wildland fire, order an appropriate IMT through your Zone Interagency Dispatch Center

[8] Prepare Agency Administrator's briefing: Work with your fire staff to prepare the Agency Administrator's briefing package for the incoming IMT. Set a time and location for this briefing and inform your Zone Interagency Dispatch Center.

[9] Prepare the Delegation of Authority: Set the specific objectives you expect the incident commander and the IMT to meet in managing the wildland fire.

[10] Assign and brief your Resource Advisor: Select a trusted individual to represent you as your resource advisor to the IMT. Ideally, involve this person in the decision-making processes and documentation identified above. Thoroughly brief your resource advisor of your expectations and their relationship to you and the team.

[11] Provide direction and support to the IMT: Once the IMT is assigned to the wildland fire, stay informed, available and involved in managing the incident.

[12] Plan for fire rehabilitation: Consider the need for burned area emergency rehabilitation (BAER) and fire suppression effects rehabilitation, and order/assign a BAER team as necessary.

[13] Transition back to local management: Monitor progress and evaluate conditions, and once the objectives set for the incident and the team have been met, return management of the incident to the home unit.

B. Decision Making

In high reliability organizations such as wildland fire suppression, the decision-making process can occur one of two ways; by rational decision making or by recognition primed decision making. You will probably use both during the course of a large wildland fire. It is important to recognize that in either, decision errors can occur which can lead to serious, undesirable consequences.

1. Rational Decision Making

Rational decision making is the process we typically use in complying with NEPA and other laws. It is the appropriate process for developing the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis. Its steps include:

- a. gather the facts;
- b. establish evaluation criteria;
- c. establish and analyze options;
- d. choose the best option;
- e. implement the chosen option; and
- f. monitor the results.

2. Recognition Primed Decision Making

Recognition primed decision making occurs when we do not have time to move through each of the steps associated with rational decision making. Instead, we use the available time to size up the situation, developing situational awareness until we automatically recognize the right thing to do, based on the nearest match between the event and our experience.

3. Decision Errors

In any decision making process, decision errors can occur when the person(s) responsible for the decision is/are;

- ignorant of their responsibility to make the particular decision;
- ignorant of critical information relevant to the issue to be decided;
- possessing a casual approach to the importance of inputs relevant to the issue to be decided, or to the seriousness or importance of the overall situation requiring a decision (frequently results when duties or information is overloaded);
- distracted by other events, tasks, sense of priority; and
- as a situation degrades, or critical decision gates increase, stress mounts; tunnel vision sets in and we focus on what we know, what is familiar, tending to miss important things, or at the worst, ignoring things that are important.

Any of the above can begin or aggravate the error chain that may ultimately lead to a process failure when decisions are not made, or are poorly made. Mitigating a potential or emerging error chain can be accomplished by:

- know it is there, be aware of it;
- practice your experience; if you don't have it, surround yourself by those who do;
- delegate, use team decision making; and
- if you see an error, yours or someone else's, acknowledge it, speak out, and consider the consequences of other actions.

Fire Management "Primer"

(Or, Tips for Success)

Review the current year Interagency Standards for Fire and Aviation Operations, NFES 2724, Program Organization and Responsibilities for your Agency.

1. Good communicators are successful in all endeavors. This is certainly true in fire management. Wander around, ask lots of questions, have the fire management officer brief you daily during appropriate times, call your State or Regional Fire and Aviation Management Director, or the Southwest Coordination Center Director anytime. It is easier to help before decisions are made than after.
2. Give your fire management officer a written delegation of authority that gives them the adequate level of operational authority that you want them to exercise. Clearly spell it out.
3. You and your fire management officer need to go over the Fire Management Plan annually.
4. Meet personally with as many of the fire crews as possible. Give them your fire safety message and your expectations. The military calls it "Command Presence," but the firefighters feel you care. It helps overcome their concern that management just provides "Lip Service" to safety.
5. Set up a team of 6 to 10 people who are really well qualified to prepare an escaped fire wildland fire situation analysis. They don't all have to participate each time, but you want to be sure that the well trained folks are the core of the group doing this analysis. Often an agency administrator only needs to do one of these every 6 to 8 years. It makes it difficult to be proficient. Having a trained cadre will make everyone successful.
6. Go to the fire!
7. Go to the closeouts. Participate in team evaluations. Be a significant part of team briefings.
8. As an incident is escalating from initial attack through extended attack, to a Type II incident, be sure the fire management group is giving you a new complexity analysis each day to review and approve. After you reach a Type I incident, this becomes unnecessary unless a new Wildland Fire Situation Analysis is needed. Make sure a review of the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis takes place every day of each incident, regardless of size after it escapes initial attack.
9. Set an expectation on your unit that all employees are part of the wildfire suppression organization. Are they getting the training they need?
10. Have the Zone Coordination Center give you and your public affairs officer a copy of the Energy Release Component (ERC) graph daily from April 1 to July 15.
11. Establish the following expectations as yours and follow-up to ensure they are met:
 - Safety for the public and firefighters is top priority.
 - Work rest guidelines will be followed during all operations.
 - Only trained and fully qualified people will be assigned to fire duty.
 - All incoming personnel will be appropriately briefed.
 - Incidents will be managed economically and with fiscal integrity.
12. Consider using a Incident Business Adviser when you are experiencing a large incident(s).

13. Make sure you are kept informed of the availability and unavailability of red-carded individuals being reported to the Zone Coordination Center by your unit.
14. Come into the Southwest Coordination Center for a 1 to 3 day period and shadow the Coordination Center Director.
15. Watch your Fire Management Officer. Sometimes they can get up to their necks in alligators during major incidents. It is a really good idea to bring in a shadow for them to help pick up the overload chores. This is not a sign of weakness or poor performance. In fact, it is a sign of being on top of the situation.
16. Remember, if you don't have a fire management plan completed and approved, you are obligated to put out a fire at the least cost. You can use confine and contain tactics to do this and consider resource benefits, but your goal is Safety and least cost.
17. Ask your Fire Management Officer if the Expanded Dispatch Plan is in place. Are there names assigned to positions? Are they trained?
18. Are readiness inspections completed each preseason?
19. Have you set an expectation that all your staff must be in partnership to accomplish the planning and execution needed in the future fire management program?
Ask any of the fire and aviation management folks to name their six emphasis areas. See if they know: Cost leadership, wildland-urban interface, large fire suppression management, smoke, wildland fire management planning, and tomorrow's workforce. They should also remember that diversity, safety, and customer satisfaction are integral building blocks of all six.
21. Make sure units are sticking with the basics. Is reinvention resulting in a skill level that does not provide the basic fire management skills on your unit?
22. Get to know the Zone Board and Geographic Coordinating Group members. These folks are in place to insure Agency Administrator success, but suffer from lack of line attention at times. A seamless organization is a boundaryless, interagency organization. Make sure your board knows and understands your expectations. One of those expectations should be that they have a workforce plan in place to insure that trained, experienced people will be in place in future years.
23. Visit project work sites where fire crews are working during the pre and postseason. Let them know that the workforce of the future in fire is a yearlong profession. You want them to step up and assume greater leadership roles, and that you really care for them.
24. Pass out lots of thank yous, praise, and compliments when deserved.
25. Make sure you have a trained, designated Aviation Officer. This person can help you insure that trouble doesn't occur with mission planning, flight following, briefings, and more. Aviation is high risk and cost, but sound mission execution has high payoff potential for your project needs. The Aviation Officer will make sure that the necessary procedures are followed in a way to keep you successful.
26. Ask what is included in NFMAS/FIREPRO/FIREBASE for your unit. Make sure someone is updating it yearly. Not updating is very harmful to your annual presuppression budget.
27. Keep asking everyone you see what LCES means; ask crews on the line where their safety zone or escape routes are, make sure they have a Pocket Guide.
28. Lastly, the most important Axiom is: Get Help!! There are lots available, and people want to help and can act as mentors if asked.