

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Interagency Fire Program Management

Qualifications Standards and Guide

White Paper

May 24, 2004

“Interagency Fire Program Management Qualifications Standards and Guide”

Background:

Following the South Canyon Fire in 1994, an interagency team was formed to investigate the fatalities and contributing factors. The subsequent *1995 Federal Wildland Fire Policy and Program Review*, signed by both Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior, directed Federal wildland fire agencies to establish fire management qualifications standards to improve firefighter safety and increase professionalism in fire management programs. An Interagency Fire Program Management Qualifications Task Group was established to develop these qualification standards and to accomplish other related assignments. A more detailed history and chronology of events is at Appendix A.

I. The Interagency Fire Program Management (IFPM) Standard

The objective of the Interagency Fire Program Management Qualifications Task Group (Task Group) has been to complete staff work, acceptable to all federal agencies with wildland fire management responsibilities and to the Office of Personnel Management, sufficient for the establishment of minimum qualifications standards for key fire management positions. In accomplishing this, the Task Group has developed:

- 14 key fire management positions (Appendix B) and established minimum qualification standards with consideration for the complexity of the fire program where the position is located. These positions are:
 - Interagency Hotshot Crew (IHC) Superintendent (technical)
 - Helicopter Manager (technical)
 - Senior Firefighter (technical)
 - Engine Module Supervisor (technical)
 - Supervisory Fire Engine Operator (technical)
 - Initial Attack Dispatcher (technical)
 - Wildland Fire Operations Specialist (professional or technical)
 - Prescribed Fire and Fuels Specialist (professional or technical)
 - Prevention and Education Specialist (professional or technical)
 - Initial Attack Lead Dispatcher/Assistant Center Manager (technical)
 - Center Manager (professional or technical)
 - Unit Fire Program Manager (professional)
 - Geographic Area Fire Program Manager (professional)
 - National Fire Program Manager (professional)

Positions annotated “professional or technical” may be established as professional or technical at the GS-9 level and below depending upon whether professional or technical knowledge is required, the organizational structure exists, and the competency is met as established in the rating guide.

- Office of Personnel Management (OPM) approved Supplemental Qualification Standard for GS-0401 Fire Management Specialist, the selected series for professional fire management positions.
- Competency descriptors for key fire management positions.
- A rating guide for evaluating fire program complexity.
- Minimum grade levels predetermined by application of the complexity guide and the appropriate position classification standard.
- Standard Key Performance Elements based on the competencies for each position.
- A list of required and recommended training for designated agency managers.
- A system to determine when a “specialist” or center manager position is professional or technical based on pre-determined competencies and job complexity.
- Agreement that all IFPM fire positions classifiable at GS-11 and above are professional positions based on the required competencies and job complexity.

II. The IFPM Standard consists of four components:

1. OPM Qualification Standard Requirements (Appendix C). For professional positions, the IFPM Standard lists the required Supplemental Qualification Standard for the GS-0401 Fire Management Specialist. For the technical positions, the GS-0455 (Range Technician) and GS-0462 (Forestry Technician) qualification requirements are listed.
2. Specialized Experience Requirements. This is specific creditable experience necessary for the employee to qualify for the grade of the position to be filled.
3. National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Incident Management Qualifications.
4. Additional Required Training for Position in Question. This is listed as required coursework.

The products developed by the Task Group and the Standards will:

- improve wildland firefighter and public safety by establishing, for the first time, interagency standardized incident management training and specialized experience requirements;
- establish minimum collegiate-level or NWCG and other creditable educational standards for professional fire program managers to meet the OPM-approved supplemental qualification standard for GS-0401 fire management specialist;
- streamline the hiring process and ensure that qualified people are hired;
- enhance interagency consistency in hiring and promotion practices;

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- enhance retention and promotion opportunities (e.g., by facilitating the movement of employees from technical positions to fire management positions and increasing fire knowledge and skills within the workforce);
- improve the capability of using fire on the ground, reducing fire hazard, and improving land conditions;
- develop standard interagency fire management position descriptions;
- provide employee development tools for identifying career training, education, and experience needs and opportunities, which helps meet the workforce requirements of the:
 - National Fire Plan;
 - 10-Year Strategic Plan;
 - Tri-Data Firefighter Safety Report;
 - Forest Service Agency Strategy for Fire Management Report; and
 - Department of the Interior Human Capital Workforce Plan.

III. Steps to Implementation

Implementation of the IFPM Standard: Implementation will begin *October 1, 2004*, with full implementation to be accomplished by *October 1, 2009*. Within 30 days of the date the implementation memorandum is signed, the National Fire and Aviation Executive Board (NFAEB) will charter and begin overseeing a standing committee composed of fire management and human resources personnel from USDA Forest Service and Department of the Interior (DOI) headquarters and bureaus. This standing committee will develop specific implementation instructions that will provide the vehicles for carrying out the broad implementation actions discussed below. Prior to the October 1, 2004 implementation date, the Forest Service and DOI bureaus will develop strategies, plans and budgets required to successfully implement the IFPM Standard.

A. Reclassification of Positions to the Appropriate Technical or Professional Series.

The Forest Service and DOI bureaus will determine whether a position should be established as a technical or professional position, based on application of the appropriate OPM position classification standard and the IFPM standard for each Key Fire Program Position. If a position is reclassified to a professional series, the procedures for filling vacant positions will be followed as outlined in Section B. Directions contained in Section C apply to encumbered positions.

B. Filling Vacant Key Fire Program Positions

Professional Positions: Between October 1, 2004 and October 1, 2009, all vacant or newly-created positions determined to be professional may be classified and advertised in separate announcements as both professional (GS-0401) and technical (GS-0462, GS-0455). The GS-0301 series will not be used for any of the Key Fire Program positions. After October 1, 2009, professional fire positions will only be classified and advertised as a GS-0401, unless an exception is granted (see Section IV. Agency support to assist workforce development).

If a well qualified GS-0401 candidate cannot be hired for the position, it may be filled with a GS-0462/GS-0455 who meets the IFPM Standard requirements. This is contingent upon this individual completing the positive education requirement of the Supplemental Qualification Standard for the GS-0401 Fire Management Specialist before October 1, 2009. This contingency will be clearly stated in the technician job announcement and in an agreement signed by the candidate upon accepting the position. Upon completing the requirements, the incumbent may be non-competitively converted to a GS-0401 at the current grade level.

Technical positions: Technical positions will be staffed in the appropriate series (i.e., either GS-0455 or GS-0462). Individuals selected must meet all of the minimum qualification standards..

Exception: All of the 14 Key Fire Program Management positions require NWCG Qualifications as a part of the Standard. These are the three areas of Command, Operations, and Prescribed Fire. Some of these positions do not require currency in these positions. Until October 1, 2009, only two of any 3 specified non-currency NWCG position requirements must be met. If only two non-currency NWCG positions are required, both must be met. This is true for both professional and technical positions.

(Explanatory Note: Experience will be credited as professional experience if the experience was gained in a technical or administrative fire position that has been or will be converted to the professional GS-0401 series.)

C. Encumbered Key Fire Program Positions as of October 1, 2004

Converting from technical or administrative fire positions to GS-0401: Encumbered Key Fire Program positions earmarked for reclassification to GS-0401 (e.g., from the GS-0301, GS-0455, or GS-0462

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series), will not be re-classified until the incumbents meet all the IFPM Standard requirements within the time constraints. Management and the employee must create an Individual Development Plan to meet the October 1, 2009 implementation date. When the incumbent meets all IFPM Standard qualification requirements for the position, it will be reclassified, and the incumbent will be non-competitively converted to the GS-0401 series at the same grade level (*See 5 CFR 335.103. Agency Promotion Programs, Section (c) (3), Discretionary Actions*).

(Explanatory Note: Experience gained in a technical or administrative fire position that is later converted to a professional GS-0401 position will be credited as professional experience.)

Encumbered Key Fire Program Management Positions that will remain appropriately classified as professional or technical:

Incumbents must meet minimum required components within the five-year period. Incumbents in professional positions must also meet the Supplemental Qualification Standard for the GS-0401 Fire Management Specialist. Management and the employee must create an Individual Development Plan which will meet the October 1, 2009 implementation date.

IV. Agency support to assist workforce development:

The agencies have collectively agreed to provide the funding and opportunities (e.g., training, compensated time) for employees in Key Fire Program Positions to meet the minimum qualification requirements of the IFPM Standard. However, there could be circumstances beyond agencies' and/or employee control which prevent an employee from meeting the requirements within the allotted time. On rare occasions, extensions of the 5-year period may be approved by the NFAEB and Department-level fire management and human resources staff, in accordance with procedures developed by the Standing Committee.

V. Special Provisions for Certain In-service Placement Actions:

It is important to recognize that on rare occasions there may be incumbents who do not meet the required educational requirements, but who have exceptional experience in performing the duties and responsibilities of the encumbered position. In these instances, in accordance with OPM regulations, an interagency board composed of at least two persons who have professional standing in the field of fire program management (one from USDA, and one from DOI's Secretariat Level) will be established. This board will conduct a comprehensive review of the employee's education and experience to determine eligibility for the position earmarked to be reclassified to the professional GS-0401 series.

To be considered qualified for the reclassified position, the employee's work experience and education must reflect significant full performance-level accomplishment of the duties of the position. These actions must be certified by the interagency board. If the employee aspires to any other position, he/she will be subject to the normal regulations and procedures that govern promotions, reassignments, etc.

VI. Revisions and Updates to the IFPM Guide

The NFAEB will oversee a standing committee which will develop a process to periodically revise and update the IFPM Guide and the Supplemental Qualification Standard for the GS-0401 Fire Management Specialist.

Appendix A

Interagency Fire Program Management Standards and Guide

Background History and Chronology

Background

On July 6, 1994, a combination of fire fighting resources including helitack, smokejumpers and interagency hotshot crews were assigned to the South Canyon Fire west of Glenwood Springs, Colorado. A dry cold front with very strong winds passed over the area that afternoon causing all 49 firefighters to abandon the fireline in an attempt to escape the 100 foot flames of the rekindled inferno. Thirty-five firefighters survived; 14 died.

An interagency team was formed to investigate the fatalities and contributing factors. The South Canyon Fire Investigation Report was published on August 17, 1994. As a result, the Acting Director, Bureau of Land Management, and the Chief, Forest Service, established the Interagency Management Review Team (IMRT) to serve as a steering group, study the findings and conclusions of the Investigation Team, and propose a plan for corrective action.

Management Actions and Expectations

On October 17, 1994, the IMRT Report was published. In the report it was noted that some key management personnel, who had direct impact on firefighter safety and programs, did not have adequate backgrounds or qualifications in fire management. It included, among others, these recommendations (IMRT Topic 3.6):

1. "Establish minimum qualifications for fire managers and agency administrators who are required to make fire management decisions."
2. "Agency Administrators should ensure that personnel holding, or selected for, fire management or agency administrator positions are qualified for the level of wildland fire complexity involved in the position or are able to obtain these qualifications within an acceptable time period."

On December 18, 1995, the U.S. Department of Interior and the U.S. Department of Agriculture published the final report of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Program Review (1995 Federal Fire Policy). This Report was signed by the Secretaries of both Departments. To improve firefighter safety and increase professionalism in fire programs, it directed the federal agencies to:

“establish fire management qualifications based on program complexity, and staff existing and future agency administrator and fire management vacancies with individuals who meet these qualifications and who are committed to accomplishing the total fire management program”

On May 23, 1996, the U.S. Department of Interior and the U.S. Department of Agriculture published the Implementation Action Plan Report outlining action items which must be accomplished by the signatory agencies to fully implement the Federal Fire Policy. To address safety and professionalism issues, several action items were specific to the development of qualifications for agency administrators and personnel assigned fire management duties including:

Action Item 27. “establish fire management qualifications based on program complexity, and staff existing and future agency administrator and fire management vacancies with individuals who meet these qualifications and who are committed to accomplishing the total fire management program.”

Action Item 62, “Develop and utilize consistent fire management qualification standards and specific selection criteria for fire program managers.”

Action Item 63: “Establish job performance standards for agency administrators and fire managers that clearly reflect the complexity and scope of fire management responsibilities.”

The Federal Fire and Aviation Leadership Council (FFALC: the respective Fire Directors of the USDA-Forest Service, and USDI-Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service) combined the IMRT Action Item 3.6 with action items #27, 28, 62, 63, and 64 of the “Implementation Action Report Plan” for the “Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Program Review, 12/95”. To accomplish these action items along with other assignments, the FFALC formed an Interagency Fire Program Management Qualifications Task Group. An initial meeting was held in July, 1997.

Further support for interagency fire program management competencies and qualifications was identified in the “Wildland Firefighter Safety Awareness Study”, a FFALC-sponsored study contracted to the Tridata Corporation, Arlington, Virginia. In March 1998, Tridata Corporation released its Phase III Report, “Implementing Cultural Changes for Safety”. Chapter 4 of the Report, “Leadership and Fire Management”, identified three goals for achieving leadership experience and competence, with the ultimate objectives of increasing firefighter safety and improving program professionalism:

“Goal 42: Fire experience and competency should be considered as critical selection factors for fire leadership and fire management positions.”

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“Goal 43: All personnel in a given position must meet the performance requirements of that position.”

“Goal 44: Fire Management Officers (FMO’s) must be selected from among those with fire backgrounds.”

The Implementation Strategy for accomplishing these safety-oriented goals is to “Set and enforce minimum requirements for key leadership positions.”

CHRONOLOGY:

- **July 6, 1994** __ 14 firefighters died in the South Canyon Fire west of Glenwood Springs, CO.
- **August 17, 1994** __ The South Canyon Fire Investigation Report was published by an interagency team that was formed to investigate the fatalities and contributing factors. As a result, the Acting Director, Bureau of Land Management, and the Chief, Forest Service, established the Interagency Management Review Team (IMRT) to serve as a steering group, study the Report’s findings and conclusions, and propose a plan for corrective action.
- **October 17, 1994** __ The IMRT published its report. It found that some key management personnel who had direct impact on firefighter safety and programs did not have adequate backgrounds or qualifications in fire management. The IMRT’s recommendations included the following:
 1. Establish minimum qualifications for fire managers and agency administrators who are required to make fire management decisions.
 2. Agency Administrators should ensure that personnel holding, or selected for, fire management or agency administrator positions are qualified for the level of wildland fire complexity involved in the position or are able to obtain these qualifications within an acceptable time period.
- **December 18, 1995** __ DOI and USDA published the final report (signed by both Secretaries) of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Program Review (1995 Federal Fire Policy). To improve firefighter safety and increase professionalism in fire programs, the Report directed Federal agencies to:

establish fire management qualifications based on program complexity, and staff existing and future agency administrator and fire management vacancies with individuals who meet these qualifications and who are committed to accomplishing the total fire management program.
- **May 23, 1996** __ DOI and USDA published the Implementation Action Plan Report that outlined actions to be accomplished to fully implement the Federal Fire Policy. To address safety and professionalism issues, several action items

specific to the development of qualifications for agency administrators and personnel assigned fire management duties included:

1. Action Item 27. (same as the statement above);
2. Action Item 62. Develop and utilize consistent fire management qualification standards and specific selection criteria for fire program managers.
3. Action Item 63. Establish job performance standards for Agency Administrators and fire managers that clearly reflect the complexity and scope of fire management responsibilities.

Throughout this time, various efforts were underway to address recognized fire program qualifications deficiencies, both coincidental to, and as a result of, the IMRT Report and the Federal Fire Policy Review. As examples:

- **July, 1995** __ The National Park Service convened an interagency task group to identify essential competencies for selected fire management positions.
- **August 1995** __ The “Interagency Task Group Report: Federal Fire and Aviation Management Competencies” was produced by that interagency task group.
- **August, 1995** __ The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) conducted an internal National Fire and Aviation Review. The outcome of this review was the establishment of performance standards for BLM agency administrators and fire program managers.
- **April, 1996** __ BLM established qualification standards for six key fire management positions in the *GS-0401 series*.

Subsequently, the FFLAC formed the Interagency Fire Program Management Qualifications Task Group to accomplish these and other action items.

• **July, 1997** __ the Task Group held its first meeting. The Task Group’s objectives were to complete staff work, acceptable to all Federal agencies with wildland fire management responsibilities and to the Office of Personnel Management, sufficient to establish minimum qualifications standards for key fire management positions. The Task Group:

- drafted management and “red card” qualifications for key fire management positions, based on program complexity;
- determined that there are no differences in qualifications or competencies between collateral duty or multi-functional positions and full fire management positions (job requirements are the same);
- identified existing appropriate tools (training, handbooks, job performance guidelines, planning documents) necessary to assist administrators and fire

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- management personnel in administering and managing safe and efficient wildland fire programs;
- drafted standard selective placement factors for key fire management positions to be included in all Federal vacancy announcements;
- drafted standardized key performance elements (critical results) for fire management positions;
- drafted consistent and adequate agency administrator training requirements for those making wildland fire management decisions, based on program complexity;
- drafted generic position description language for entry level, full performance, collateral duty, and supervisory fire management positions and recommended grades, based on program scope and complexity.
- drafted Supplemental GS-0401 Qualification Standards for professional fire management work that includes academic and work experience criteria to provide consistency between all Federal wildland fire management agencies.

January, 2000 __ The *Interagency Fire Program Management Qualifications Standards and Guide* was approved by FFALC.

August, 2002 __ The Supplemental GS-0401 Qualification Standards for professional fire management work was approved for use by the Office of Personnel Management.

October 1, 2004 _ Initial implementation date of the *Interagency Fire Program Management Qualifications Standards and Guide* for the five Federal wildland fire agencies.

References:

- Report of the Interagency Management Review Team, 10/17/1994
- Report of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Program Review, 12/18/1995
- Implementation Action Report, USDA and USDI, 05/23/1996
- Wildland Firefighter Safety Awareness Study Report “Implementing Cultural Changes for Safety”, 03/1998
- USDA Forest Service Jacobs Report, “An Interagency Strategy for Fire Management”, 01/2000
- Brookings Institute’s “Where Have all the Firefighters Gone?”, 07/2000
- Federal Fire Policy and Review of 1995

Appendix B

14 Key Fire Management Positions

Positions Covered by the IFPM Standard: The 14 key fire program management positions are listed below. The titles listed are generic; official titles are based on titling instructions in the governing position classification standards. They are annotated to indicate which are professional, and/or technical positions.

- Interagency Hotshot Crew (IHC) Superintendent (technical)
- Helicopter Manager (technical)
- Senior Firefighter (technical)
- Engine Module Supervisor (technical)
- Supervisory Fire Engine Operator (technical)
- Initial Attack Dispatcher (technical)
- Wildland Fire Operations Specialist (professional or technical)
- Prescribed Fire and Fuels Specialist (professional or technical)
- Prevention and Education Specialist (professional or technical)
- Initial Attack Lead Dispatcher/Assistant Center Manager (technical)
- Center Manager (professional or technical)
- Unit Fire Program Manager (professional)
- Geographic Area Fire Program Manager (professional)
- National Fire Program Manager (professional)

Positions annotated “professional or technical” may be established as professional or technical at the GS-9 level and below depending upon whether professional or technical knowledge is required, the organizational structure exists, and the competency is met as established in the rating guide.