

NIFC News

National Interagency Fire Center
3833 S. Development Ave.
Boise, ID 83705



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Contact: Rose Davis, 387-5437
or Don Smurthwaite, 387-5895

Australian, New Zealand Fire Specialists to Assist in Montana

About 53 fire specialists from Australia and New Zealand will arrive in the United States on August 27th, eventually bound for Montana to help assist with wildfire suppression efforts there.

The fire personnel will fill mid-level management positions such as helicopter base manager, strike team leader, and division supervisors, as well as Incident Command Team roles in operations, planning and logistics, said Sue Vap, fire director for the National Park Service at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) in Boise, Idaho.

“In an active fire season, those positions relating to experienced fireline leadership are most difficult for us to fill,” said Vap. “The Australians and New Zealanders come to us trained and highly-qualified. They use a command system very similar to ours. It’s a good fit for everyone.”

Fifty-four fire specialists are expected to arrive at NIFC late in the afternoon or early evening on Wednesday, August 27th. They will receive an orientation on Thursday and Friday, with most being deployed to Montana on Saturday.

This is the third time in the last four years that fire specialists from New Zealand and Australia have come to the United States to assist with suppression efforts. In late January, during the peak of the Australian fire season, a contingent of U.S. fire specialists was sent to the state of Victoria for a month. In the past, NIFC has called on Canadian firefighters as well, but due to a severe fire season in areas such as British Columbia, Canadian personnel are unavailable.

“We value the expertise and experience that the fire specialist from Australia and New Zealand bring,” Vap said. “They come with the skills we need at a time when we need them.”
