

August 13, 2003

To: All DOI Employees  
From: The Secretary /signed/ Gale A. Norton  
Subject: 2003 Wildland Fire Season

Almost overnight wildland fire activity escalated with dozens of large fires burning in several western states, and initial attack forces responding to hundreds of new fires each day. The national preparedness level stands at 5, the highest level possible. Clearly, we've moved into the most intense and dangerous time of the wildland fire season and the outlook is not promising in terms of weather and fuel conditions.

Wildland fires throughout the West during the hot summer months are not unusual; what concerns me, however, is the potential for these fires to grow large, behave erratically, and threaten firefighters and the public. I caution and advise each one of you whether you fight the fire or oversee firefighters on the line to consider carefully each decision, each action, to ensure that every individual's safety is considered first and foremost. The Department's policy is clear: firefighter and public safety comes first, always.

As wildland fire activity continues over the next few weeks, I ask agency supervisors to make all qualified personnel available for fire assignments. Employees who are currently qualified to work in a fire assignment should check with their supervisors and then share their availability and qualifications with the appropriate field, state or regional fire management officer. Employees with aviation, operations, logistics and finance backgrounds will, as in the past, be in high demand. If your employees are red-carded, their first priority should be wildland fire suppression and support.

For those of you on the fireline or headed there in the next few weeks and for those who support firefighting operations, thank you for your commitment and dedication, and have a safe fire season.