

Coronado National Forest

Border Fire Initial Attack Protocol

PURPOSE: The Forest is dedicated to safe and efficient initial attack on wildfires that require suppression. An intricate element in this efficiency is the Forest's mission to dispatch the closest available resources. Critical to the safety of the firefighters in initial attack on fires in the area of the international border, is the sharing of intelligence, having a standard of procedures, and following an established protocol. The following *Border Fire Initial Attack Protocol* attempts to collect and distribute the collection of current information and procedures, much of which is already established on the Coronado National Forest, to enhance firefighter safety and situation awareness in and around the fire environment and the international border. It is to be implemented when fires are reported in the "A" Attentive Risk Zone as indicated on the Coronado NF *International Border Watchouts* pocket card. However, discretion may be exercised by any member of the Forest's Fire Management Program to enact this protocol when it is deemed necessary.

PROTOCOL RESPONSIBILITIES:

Fire Management Program

- Ensure all firefighters, locals and guests, have in their possession, the Coronado NF *International Border Watchouts* pocket card.
- Forest and District Fire Management will seek periodic updates on law enforcement activities, concerns, and special emphasis projects. Special effort will be made in the late spring of each year for a preseason update from Forest Service LE&I and U.S. Customs and Border Patrol. District Fire Management is encouraged to meet with local U.S. Customs and Border Patrol officials in the spring of every year to discuss the upcoming fire season and security issues.
- Daily fire season briefings will include updates as acquired, periodic review of the *International Border Watchouts* card, and this Initial Attack Protocol.
- This protocol is to be shared with all fire fighters on the Forest, including detailed resources or individuals, severity resources, and resources otherwise assigned to the Coronado.
- Forest and District Fire Management will be familiar with the annual operating plan and cooperative agreement with Mexico for initial attack assistance. District FMOs and Line Officers will ensure each qualified incident commander on the districts is familiar with this agreement and operating plan.
- NOTE: For campaign fires or incidents requiring complex and outside management, the Forest and/or District overhead will assist in gaining US Customs & Border Patrol cooperation in incident management, preferably through a Border Patrol liaison available to the management organization.

Tucson Dispatch Center (TDC)

- Follow established and normal procedures for collecting initial information and dispatching resources to a reported fire.

- Place an order for a Law Enforcement Officer to be assigned to the fire as a safety and security resource for fire fighters. Utilize other agency Law Enforcement Officers when necessary due to unavailability of Forest Service LE. This is not a Fire Investigator order. If the order can not be filled immediately, the IC, FMO, and/or Line Officer have discretion in the decision to commit resources to the incident.
- Initiate “Ground Deconfliction” procedures. This entails contacting US Customs & Border Protection Tucson Sector Office and local US Forest Service Special Agent (and other agencies as determined) to notify of the fire’s location and seek information regarding any law enforcement or known illegal activity of concern in the area.
- Report intelligence gathered from “Ground Deconfliction” to Incident Commander or first resource on scene, as well as the reporting Law Enforcement Officer. Follow-up with the IC and others is vital if not all positions are assigned or on scene when “Ground Deconfliction” is accomplished.
- Dispatchers will be familiar with the annual operating plan and cooperative agreement with Mexico for initial attack assistance. The plan and all contact names and numbers will be readily available in the dispatch office. As requested by the IC or other District or Forest Leadership, the TDC will immediately make the appropriate contacts and obtain the appropriate permissions according to the operating plan and agreement.
- If night operations exist or if personnel rest over night (RON) on the fire scene, ensure the dispatch office is staffed accordingly. Prompt the IC for this information/decision if necessary.

Initial Attack Resources and District Fire Management

- District overhead in conjunction with the IC will determine the appropriate level of suppression response. Initial dispatch of resources will be guided by the established matrix, but adjustments can be made based on the assessment by the IC and District Fire Management. This decision is to be based on the values at risk, resources available, and level of security and/or risk in the fire area. The availability of LE security should also be factored into the decision to commit resources.
- Dispatched/assigned resources will implement “Ground Follow” procedures. Such procedures are an enhancement of current normal communication procedures:
 - √ Ensure acknowledgement of dispatch to the incident by the assigned resource.
 - √ While enroute to the incident, keep TDC informed occasionally of your current location and direction of travel as noted by landmarks and/or major intersections with the Forest roads system. This will also help to establish the best route into the scene for other resources.
 - √ Ensure each resource checks in with the IC and/or notifies TDC of being “on-scene.”
 - √ IC should maintain regular contact with TDC, reporting status updates for the duration of the incident.
 - √ Ensure each resource and/or the IC, notifies TDC as resources leave the scene.
 - √ Ensure all resources checkout with TDC, no sooner than they are parked back at the duty station.

- Look for opportunities to post an additional security lookout on scene, in addition to any needed fire lookout.
- Work in pairs whenever possible, including travel to and from border fires and on-scene tasks.
- Make any/all reasonable attempts to scout the area for any persons who might be unaware of the fire or might be in harm's way.
- Make all possible attempts to ensure that security LE personnel are not mistaken as a firefighters, and also ensure that no firefighter and/or fire vehicle can be mistaken as an LE vehicle. If the security LE officer's location on scene requires nomex PPE, LE will make attempts to utilize nomex other than the traditional yellow. (Opportunities for "AGENT" or "POLICE" marked, beige nomex shirts will be trialed this year 08 by our local FS LE&I.)
- Have alternative communications tools available on scene such as cellular and satellite phones.
- The IC, in consort with the District Line Officer, FMO, and/or Forest Fire Staff will determine the need for action across the U.S.-Mexico border. If action is determined necessary within the bounds of the cooperative agreement, the IC will notify TDC immediately to make the appropriate contacts and obtain the appropriate permissions.
- Nighttime operations or RON on scene of a border fire requires some additional mitigation and review of options.
 - √ Consider leaving the scene and returning home for the night, ONLY if the IC is comfortable with containment and the fire perimeter is secure.
 - √ Consider leaving the scene ONLY if fatigue is not a factor. The IC and if possible, the Line Officer should consider border security concerns in conjunction with the impacts to the work-to-rest ratio caused by traveling home. Rely on risk management strategies to balance fatigue, travel, fire containment, and border security.
 - √ If taking action across the international border, make all possible attempts in strategy to return to the U.S. side of the border after dark.
 - √ If the need to RON on scene is determined, keep all personnel in one group and in one location. Ensure that the LE security position has been filled and/or adequate LE relief is on scene if personnel are going to RON on scene. Ensure that overnight dispatch operations are in place and give ample notice of that need.
- If a person(s) in distress is encountered, personnel may use discretion in offering critical first aid or other assistance. However, diligence and good situation awareness should be ahead of any decision to offer assistance to another unknown party. Ensure your own safety and scan your surroundings before stopping your vehicle or approaching an unknown party. Regardless if aid was offered to or accepted by the party in distress, the location and other information must be relayed to the Border Patrol through TDC immediately. This protocol also applies in the unfortunate event that personnel come across a deceased person or any human remains.
- Watch for "copy cat" vehicles. Illegal activity along the border has involved vehicles painted to look like Forest Service or other agency vehicles. Take note of any thing out of the

ordinary, including any drivers you do not recognize. Pay special attention to the small details on vehicle paint schemes, door shields, license plates, uniforms, and unit numbering. Maintain safety in all actions and observations. Expect to be stopped by other Law Enforcement, have ID and wear uniform, Coronado fire T-shirts, or fire PPE components. Be polite and cooperative if you find yourself stopped by one of our fellow LE agencies.