

# SOUTHWESTERN REGION

May 15, 2006

## FIRE BEHAVIOR ALERT

**Directed To:** Fire and Aviation Management Personnel – Region 3  
**From:** Fire and Aviation Management, Southwestern Regional Office  
**Topic/Issue:** Firefighter & Public Safety – Critically Low Live Fuel Moisture in Brush Regimes, Lack of Widespread Greenup & Record High Fire Danger

### What's different from last year?

Extremely dry conditions have persisted throughout the winter and spring, leading to very low dead and live fuel moisture values in combination with carryover fine fuels from last years excessive precipitation. Fire danger is near record levels and will escalate rapidly across all fuel regimes and at all elevations once a prolonged period of warmer and drier weather sets in. Significant green-up is NOT expected to occur in either the brush or grass species. Several field units across the Region have recorded the following live fuel moisture readings:

| Species        | Live Fuel Moisture |
|----------------|--------------------|
| Oak-brush      | 66 – 95%           |
| Manzanita      | 79 – 103%          |
| Juniper        | 74 - 96%           |
| Ponderosa Pine | 100 %              |

### Always Remember:

- Fine, flashy fuels are a Common Denominator of Fatal or Near Miss Fires.

### 'Above Normal' Fire Behavior Concerns to Firefighters and the Public:

- **Due to a lack of snow pack, expect above normal fire behavior for this time of the year.** Review pocket cards to compare current ERCs and BIs with past fire conditions. Brief in detail, all incoming firefighters to the potential and hazards of fires before deployment to the fire line.
- **Due to above normal precipitation in 2005, expect heavier fuel loadings of grass and brush in 2006.** Rates of spread, flame lengths, spotting potential and crown fire potential can all be affected. Areas that historically do not see significant fire, such as low sage and heavy juniper have more continuous fuel beds. Secondary road systems may not perform as a fuel break with the increased amounts of vegetation. There may be a decrease the areas available for safety zones. There may be additional considerations for the aerial delivery of fire-fighters.
- **Expect fine fuels to ignite easily and fires to move rapidly when influenced by low RH and wind.** During the burning period, the **average** rate of spread is 2 to 8 mph on flat ground without wind and humans walk at an average of 3 to 4 mph on flat ground.

### You can't out run it!

- **Anticipate large acres to be consumed in a short period of time.** Establishing an anchor point is critical and plan suppression tactics for larger areas.
- **Water sources for helicopter bucket work will be limited.** Locate and assess potential dip sites before you need them.
- **Continue to pay close attention to daily 'red flag' warnings and alerts as they are issued for your unit and don't lessen their importance and become complacent.** Things change rapidly this time of year.

**For more fire behavior information and updates or to provide input for your local unit, contact the Fire Behavior desk in SWCC at 505/842-3473.**