

Great Basin Area Safety Alert

July 1, 2005

Subject: Aerial Delivered Firefighters in Flashy Fuels

Area of Concern: Firefighter Safety

Distribution: Nationwide

Discussion: Fire activity in both the Great Basin and the Southwest continues to be an area of major concern this year. Heavy fuel loadings of fine flashy fuels in combination with extremely dry fuel moistures, and weather conditions contribute to rapid fire growth in this fuel type.

Insertion of Aerial Delivered Firefighters to wildfires should be approached with extra caution, due to the continuous flashy fuels and extreme fire behavior we have experienced.

The following bullets suggest considerations and tactics that can be used when delivering firefighters to incidents via aircraft:

- Ensure all firefighters have received a weather briefing for that operational period, so that unexpected weather events such as thunderstorms or cold fronts do not catch them off guard later in the day.
- In certain situations you may be in a safe area on your fire but another large fire in your vicinity could threaten your presumed safe area.
- Re-con the fire area with the aircraft to identify LCES, as well as safe heli-spots and/or jump spots that will not be compromised by the fire later in the day. Identify Safety Zones from the air before deploying firefighters.
 - Helicopter Managers and/or Smokejumper Spotters should be heavily involved with this decision making. Do not be persuaded by other personnel on the fire to place firefighters in questionable locations.
 - Consider areas proximate to the tail of the fire and preferably down hill from the main fire.
 - Past experiences have placed firefighters in compromising positions, when they had a wind shift and attempted to save their gear which was out in the middle of unburned fuel. If you are placed in such a situation it is important to remember that gear can be replaced, but human lives cannot. Think far into the future and consider an area that gear will be secure in such as.
 - Within “cold black” if possible.
 - Wide spots in a dry wash.
 - Roads.
 - Heavily trampled areas from livestock (water holes or salt licks)
 - Clear an area down to bare mineral soil and place gear within.
- During your fire briefing develop a plan for securing gear.
 - In certain situations it may be best to leave a person(s) back at the gear to secure and/or be ready to fly it out if necessary.
 - Take a few minutes to have everyone bag their gear and secure it in a safe location.
 - Drag your gear into the “cold black” if possible.
- **Pre-planning and anticipation of variable weather events is the best way to prevent being caught in a bad situation. Stick to the basics and base your planning on the extreme fire behavior we have witnessed this year in this fuel type.**