

**United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
Office of Safety and Occupational Health
Safety Alert**

No. 2003-02

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Subject: Extreme Fire Behavior in Mid-elevation Brush Stands

Area of Concern: Central and Southern Idaho

Discussion:

Most of central and southern Idaho is recording Energy Release Components above the 97th percentile level (Extreme). The area is in the fifth year of an extended drought, and the U.S. Drought Monitor has placed this area in Extreme drought. Live fuel moistures for brush and conifer species are extremely low for this time of year and approaching record low levels.

Stands of shiny-leaf ceanothus and bitterbrush that have become established in previous stand-replacement burns, and reached a height of two feet or more, will not serve as a barrier to fire spread as in past years. With moderate winds (10-15 mph at eye-level), these areas can become explosive, with rapid spread rates and flame lengths exceeding 30 feet. In addition, with poor night time humidity recovery and thermal belt effects, fires are backing readily through brush fields well into the night through grasses, sedges, and leaf litter, drying the live foliage and increasing the likelihood of extreme fire behavior.

All personnel working in these conditions and vegetation types on wildland fires must be aware and use EXTREME CAUTION during wildland fire fighting activities. These areas will NOT serve as survival zones or safety zones under any circumstances.