

Fire and Aviation Safety Team (FAST) Visit

Fire: Mule Fire (Eastern Great Basin)
Incident Commander: Dan Smith, Type II
Location: Big Piney Ranger District, Bridger Teton National Forest
Date: July 15-16, 2002

Situation:

A Type 2 Incident Management State Team from North Carolina was assigned. This 3,600 acre fire is approximately 20 miles northwest of Pinedale, Wyoming. The fire was burning in alpine fir, backing and spotting with some significant runs to the east.

FAST Members: John Shive (BLM-USO) Team Leader
Jan Peterson (BLM-IDSO) Health and Safety
Greg Vergari (R4) Fire Operations
Jill McCurdy (R4) Aviation Safety

Purpose:

Fire and Aviation Safety Teams (FAST) are activated during periods of high wildland fire activity or threat and are dispatched to provide assistance and conduct evaluations to promote safe operations. Team composition depends on the complexity of the incident.

Introduction:

The Team met with the Big Piney District Ranger and acting Zone FMO in Pinedale on the evening of July 15. Team leader emphasized the importance of “Safety” during our visit with focus on assistance and adherence to policy. The team attended the IMT preplanning and planning meeting for the following day shift in Pinedale at 1830 on the 15th. The FAST visited the ICP on the 16th attended the day shift briefing and the Helibase briefing and out briefed with both the Incident Commander (IC) and the Big Piney District Ranger on the team’s observations. The FAST followed the format of the sample questions attached to this report in conducting the visit.

Observations:

Management

This was an excellent incident management team which followed all standard ICS procedures. They did a very thorough transition with the outgoing type III team. The FAST also observed that the type III team did a very good job at facilitating the transition over a period of two days. District coordination and oversight was well executed.

Aviation

Team Members Jill McCurdy, John Shive, and Jan Peterson arrived at the helibase at approximately 0800 on 7/16/02. Briefing of helibase personnel had just begun. The Helibase Manager covered the IAP. It was noted that the Daily Helicopter Operations Briefing/Debriefing Checklist-IHOG Appendix F was not utilized. McCurdy & Shive discussed the importance of utilizing the checklist with Bob Siegler, AOBD and Chris Havener, Helibase Manager. Havener assured us that he had a checklist started and were having the pilots sign it. We reminded him to utilize it while giving briefings to ensure all pertinent topics were covered. Load calculations appeared to be correct for the temperatures/elevations. The helibase briefing board was in place and complete for the day.

The FAST supplied the AOBD with two copies of the Mini CWN Type 1 & 2 contract as well as two copies of the Interagency Aviation Transportation of Hazardous Materials Guide complete with the DOT exemption.

Aviation staffing appeared adequate with the Teton Helitack exclusive use crew (w/HEB1), exclusive use Type 3 helicopter, South Central Idaho helitack crew managing a CWN Type 1 helicopter, an AOBD, an ASGS/AOBD(T), and a HEBM(T).

The helibase appeared to be well laid out with plenty of room for expansion in the event other aircraft arrived. Deck spacing of aircraft/equipment exceeded IHOG standards. Dust abatement was in place with a water tender and a fold-a tank/hose lay set up.

Aircraft were adhering to the current IHOG fueling policy and shutting down every 2-½ hours. The helibase personnel were utilizing the helibase operations trailer appropriately. Rest areas/shade were provided for crews and pilots.

Incident Operations Safety

Fatigue Management - Time slips checked at the district were acceptable for the I.A. period. Talked to Ranger Greg Clark and he is very concerned about fatigue management. His oversight of the work/rest guidelines is exemplary. Crews on fire were managed as to work/rest guidelines and both the Type 3 and later Type 2 Team work/rest was a primary issue and managed well.

Effectiveness of Coordination Centers - Did not review. Local management indicates that things were going well with expanded dispatch and the coordination center, they had no concerns.

IMT staffing related to safety impacts - The Type 3 Team on the Mule fire was outstanding. A dedicated I.C. (Paul Hutta) dedicated OSC (Chris Vero) dedicated PSC (Ken Bailey) dedicated LSC (Mark Randall) and dedicated SOF (Greg Vergari – FAST Team member) made up a very well organized and efficient Team. Also notable mention for outstanding performance was Dessa Dale, for her efforts at supervising camp.

Change of Command - The Type 2 Team (Dan Smith) came well staffed with all positions filled plus a number of trainees. The Team has a SOF and two assistant SOF's. Team IAP was well done addressing all pertinent issues. Bill Miller the SOF on the North Carolina Team came well informed on 30 Mile issues.

Transitions from I.A. to Type 2 were very good especially from IA to Type 3. The Bridger-Teton is committed to effective Type 3 organizations. Dan Smith's Type 2 Team came well prepared and fell into place easily.

Contract/Cooperator Safety Issues - Sublet County Fire Department was involved with the Forest from the onset of the incident. Working agreements are in place with the Wyoming State Forestry and in turn the County organizations. Contract engine crews were in place on the fire beginning the day shift on 7/15. The Type 2 SOF's checked red cards.

Recognition of Fire Danger and Great Basin severity - The Type 3 Team did an excellent job strategically and tactically by paying attention to basic anchor and flanking tactics. The fire is in mostly Sub-Alpine Fir with all the normal problems of spotting, fast runs etc. They used a direct method of attack, staying on the fire edge and, mopping up as they went.

The Type 2 team was advised of the strategies and tactics applied and the logic behind this method. The first shift reflected they had taken the advice of the local unit.

Thirty Mile Compliance - The FAST checked the Forest, Type 3 Team and Type 2 Teams for compliance to the 30 Mile Action Plan. The 30 Mile Plan for Region 4 has just been delivered to the Forests. The Bridger-Teton had in place: acting Forest Supervisor (Trish Truit), acting Fire Staff (Andy Norman) and acting Zone FMO (Ken Bailey) when the Mule Incident occurred. All of the items in the action plan that address safety have been implemented on the Forest. The Type 3 Team indicated that the Forest has implemented these action items. This was reflected in the professional, dedicated Type 3 command, the complexity analysis that was completed to determine command structure and adherence to the work/rest guidelines. The Forest's Fire Management Plan has the list of Duty Officers and these were the individuals who were implementing actions.

The Type 2 Team came well informed of 30 Mile Action Plan and sat down with Ground Safety, Greg Vergari and asked to review any processes that they may not have been informed about. Ground safety gave the IMT a copy of the Thirty Mile Action Monitoring Plan-Incident Checklist. The Team was going to implement the checklist. The IMT also addressed the use of the Incident Response Pocket Guide, adherence to work/rest and pocket cards. Briefings were very well organized and delivered.

Occupational Health and Safety

There was a strong emphasis on safety during the briefings and in camp activities. The IMT demonstrated dedication for the health and safety of all personnel. A MEDL was assigned as a team member and all emergency/medical issues were expertly handled with an emphasis on prevention.

The IAP provided health and safety references and an excellent medical evacuation plan, which provided clear and concise guidelines for emergency activities. All accident and medical issues were evaluated for trend analysis.

The IMT identified hazardous road conditions and a problem with elevated driving speeds. A plan was initiated to have signs with speed limit restrictions and/or possible Law Enforcement intervention. The camp's location on a ridge posed safety issues such as exposure to weather elements and lightening strikes. The IMT was given a sample Camp Safety Plan by the FAST, which included safety guidelines for personnel during thunder and lightening activity.

Work/rest standards were being managed in accordance with the Incident Action Plan Safety Analysis (215A), which the IC updated daily.

Suppression

Strategy seemed to be sound under the current fire conditions and appeared to be meeting the WFSAs objectives.

Administration

The IMT felt that they were receiving good direction and oversight from the Forest and District as well as the Coordination Center and expanded dispatch. WFSAs were current, updated as necessary, and being signed off daily by the line officer.

/s/ John C. Shive
John C. Shive, Team Leader

July 16, 2002
Date