



# NATIONAL WILDFIRE COORDINATING GROUP

National Interagency Fire Center  
3833 South Development Avenue  
Boise, Idaho 83705

April 11, 2003

Memorandum

To: NWCG Members  
GACG Chairs

From: NWCG Chair /s/ J L Stires

Subject: 2003 Work Rest Guidelines and Length of Assignment

The NWCG tasked an interagency group to review the current work rest guidelines and length of assignment policy. This group met and drafted recommendations based on the request. The recommendations have been discussed, edited, and are now ready for implementation for the 2003 fire season.

The enclosed document supersedes any prior transmittals of the work rest and length of assignment guidelines, and provides clarification within the Initial Attack Exception contained in Chapter 10, Section 12.7-1.

The changes in the guidelines provide for opportunities to improve in managing fatigue for all resources, as well as additional flexibility in length of assignment commitments.

The work rest guidelines and length of assignment changes will be included in the 2003 publication of the National Interagency Mobilization Guide (Mob Guide) as well as an amendment to the Interagency Incident Business Management Handbook (IIBMH).

The NWCG would like input from the field throughout the fire season to assist in the finalization of these changes. These guidelines and policy will be reviewed in the fall for additional clarification. Upon review, the final guidelines and policy will be included in the full revision of the IIBMH to be published the spring of 2004, as well as the 2004 publication of the Mob Guide.

Submit your comments no later than October 1, 2003, electronically to Stephanie Horton, [shorton@fs.fed.us](mailto:shorton@fs.fed.us). The comments will be forwarded to the task group leaders. Please do not send comments until the changes have been in-place for a period of time this season in order to adequately determine if they are meeting the needs in the field.

UPDATED INTERAGENCY INCIDENT BUSINESS MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK  
LANGUAGE

**April 11, 2003**

Chapter 10

12.7-1 – Work/Rest Guidelines. Work rest guidelines should be met on all incidents.

Work Rest Definitions

For the purposes of defining work and rest in the context of the 2:1 work/rest ratio:

Work is considered to be any time attributable towards the work shift, compensable or not.

Rest is considered all time off duty outside of the work shift. (Refer to Sections 12.2 through 12.6 for on-shift, off-shift, and meal periods.) Meal periods (compensable or non-compensable) during an assigned operational period do not count towards rest. Rest includes compensable (“coyote tactics”) or non-compensable breaks greater than 90 minutes.

A work/rest period includes all hours since the last rest period that met the 2:1 work/rest ratio.

Applying Work Rest Guidelines

To maintain safe and productive incident activities, incident management personnel must appropriately manage work and rest periods, assignment duration and shift length for crew, overhead personnel and support personnel. Plan for and ensure that crews, overhead personnel, and support personnel are provided a minimum 2:1 work to rest ratio (for every 2 hours of work or travel, provide 1 hour of sleep and/or rest).

On incidents during assigned operational periods, work shift time includes travel to and from the worksite, compensable and non-compensable meal breaks, rest breaks  $\leq$  90 minutes, debriefing and equipment refurbishment following the shift in preparation for the next operational period. Work shift length maximums are just that and should be reduced as necessary to counter the effects of acute or cumulative fatigue.

The Incident Commander or Agency Administrator shall document, approve, and include in the daily incident records, the justification for work shifts exceeding 16 hours, including travel time, and for those periods that do not meet 2:1 work to rest ratio. Documentation must include mitigation measures employed to achieve compliance with 2:1 work to rest ratio policies. An acceptable method of documentation is the use of the Excess Hours Log found in the Appendix Tool Kit of this handbook.

### Initial Attack Exception

The initial attack operational period begins at the time of dispatch. Prior approval and documentation is required if the operational period exceeds 16 hours. Approval will only be granted by the Agency Administrator, or their designee, responsible for the incident if it is essential to

- 1) accomplishing immediate and critical suppression objectives, or
- 2) addresses immediate and critical firefighter or public safety issues.

After the initial attack operational period exception, 2:1 work rest guidelines will be met before the resource returns to work.

Work/Rest Mitigation: Management should use techniques to minimize the effects of cumulative fatigue, such as:

- Provide short rest breaks (up to 20 minutes)
- Schedule rest/sleep breaks during early morning hours (0001- 0500)
- Provide for rest periods of at least 1.5 hours each
- Provide supplemental food items according to policy
- Utilize shorter shift lengths ( $\leq$  14 hours or less)
- Utilize split shifts (for initial or critical times)
- Assign fatigued personnel to less strenuous work
- Provide extended off-shift time to allow employees to recover

## 12.7-2 - Length of Assignment.

### 1. Assignment Definition

An assignment is defined as the time period (days) between the check-in at the first incident or reporting location on the original resource order and commencement of return travel to the home unit.

### 2. Length of Assignment

All assignments are exclusive of travel.

All assignments are limited to 14 days, exclusive of travel, with possible extensions identified below.

Time spent in staging and preposition status counts toward the 14-day limit, regardless of pay status, for all resources, including incident management teams.

### 3. Day Off

After completion of a 14-day assignment and return to the home unit, one day off will be provided (1 after 14). Every effort should be made to achieve the day off within the individual's regularly scheduled days off. However, if the next day upon return from an incident is a regular workday, a paid day off will be authorized (State regulations may preclude authorizing this for State employees). A paid day off must occur on the calendar day immediately following the return travel and is chargeable to the incident. (See Section 12.1-2) (5 U.S.C. 6104, 5 CFR 610.301-306, and 56 Comp. Gen. Decision 393 (1977))

Pay entitlement, including administrative leave, for a paid day off cannot be authorized on the individual's regular day(s) off at their home unit.

Agencies will apply holiday pay regulations, as appropriate. A paid day off is recorded on home unit time records according to agency requirements.

Casuals are not entitled to a paid day off upon release from the incident or at their point of hire.

Contract resources are not entitled to a paid day off upon release from the

incident or at their point of hire.

#### 4. Assignment Extension

Assignments may be extended in situations where life and property are imminently threatened, suppression objectives are close to being met, a military battalion has been assigned, or replacement resources were ordered and unable to fill. The IC must perform a risk management process before considering extension of the resource. The process will identify and document the risks involved with extending the resource and fatigue countermeasures employed. A copy of the documentation should be provided to the individual(s). A form has been developed to assist in meeting this requirement and can be found in the Appendix Tool Kit section of this handbook.

The resource and their Geographic Area Coordination Center Manager, home unit supervisor, the agency administrator and the IC must agree with the extension.

- a. Resources may be extended for a period not to exceed 5 days, excluding travel. (See #3 above for day off information (1 after 14) upon return to their home unit.)
- b. Resources may be extended for a period up to an additional 14 days (back-to-back assignment) during Geographic Area or National Planning Levels 4 or 5.
- c. Resources may be extended for a period up to an additional 14 days immediately following a five- day extension as identified in a. above.
- d. The employee will be given two paid days off:
  - at the end of a 14 day assignment (b. above), or
  - at the end of a 14 day assignment with an extension (c. above)

These days off are provided prior to beginning the 14-day assignment extension, recorded as guarantee hours, and charged to the incident. After a back-to-back assignment, individuals will be released to and remain at their home unit for a minimum of four days prior to accepting a new assignment. These 4 days may include an authorized day off, regular workdays, regular

days off, and/or leave. (See #3 above for day off information (1 after 14) upon return to their home unit.)

## ***Tool Kit Addition***

### **Documentation of Length of Assignment Extension Requirements**

Documentation of any type of assignment extension should include the following:

- I. Name of Resource:
- II. Type of Extension (5 day or Back to Back (PL 4 or 5)):
- III. Rationale for extension (mark one or more)
  - A. Life and Property threatened
  - B. Suppression objective are close to being met
  - C. Replacement resources are not available (unable to fill)
  - D. Military Assignment
  - E. Other
- IV. Risk Assessment Process  
Risks associated with extending the resource (e.g., Condition of Resource (fatigue, etc), Last day off, Terrain or other environmental condition, Assignments to date, etc.)  

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

  
Mitigation of Risks (e.g., Reduce hours per operational period, Provide day off, Change of assignment, etc.)  

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---
- V. Concurrence
  - A. Resource Name: \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. Date: \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. Home Unit Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. Geographic Area Coordination Center Manager: \_\_\_\_\_
  - E. Incident Agency Administrator or Representative: \_\_\_\_\_
  - F. Recommended by Section Chief, name and title: \_\_\_\_\_
  - G. Reviewed by Safety Officer: \_\_\_\_\_
  - H. Approved by Incident Commander: \_\_\_\_\_