

## **PROJECT FACT SHEET**

Employees (including interns and volunteers) who work along the United States-Mexico border have a potentially dangerous work setting. In this decade, this area has been characterized by drug trafficking, the smuggling of immigrants, and more recently border security operations. Employees have to deal with drug smugglers, high speed pursuits of illegal immigrants and drug smugglers by law enforcement agencies, armed confrontations with dangerous people, environments littered with trash and other biological hazards, and desperate illegal immigrants seeking food, water, transportation, or rescue. Employees dedicated to managing significant desert lands and serving the public have serious concerns about their personal safety.

New employees and firefighters who are detailed into the Southwest Region from other parts of the United States are especially vulnerable. They are faced not only with a new environment—remote southwestern deserts—but unexpected situations. These individuals often lack orientation or training for responding to and avoiding these situations.

The Borderland Management Task Force (BMTF) is an interagency forum of Federal, State, local and tribal agencies that focus on border security, human safety, resource protection issues, and common solutions. The BMTF organized in Tucson in 2002 and has expanded to San Diego, El Centro, Yuma, Las Cruces, Laredo, and Del Rio. Since inception, the BMTF has focused on providing training and tools for employees working along the border.

In September 2005, the BMTF and the Coronado National Forest (CNF) requested the U.S. Forest Service, Missoula Technology and Development Center (MTDC) interview Federal employees working along the border to assess the personal safety and health problems they face. MTDC interviewed 38 employees from six different agencies. The results were reported in the MTDC report “Personal Safety of Federal Land-Management Field Employees Working Along the Mexican Border.” Beginning in May 2006, the BMTF and CNF solicited further funding and assistance from the U.S Forest Service. The Washington Office of Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness Program and the Safety and Occupational Health Program funded the project and assigned it to a team at MTDC.

To complete the project, development work was done over 2½ years. This required filming interviews, filming background imagery, qualitatively analyzing interviews to determine the content of the program, narration scripting, editing the footage into a cohesive program, and completing focus group reviews. During the development work, more than 65 employees from the BMTF agencies participated in the project through interviews, background imagery filming, and production support. In December of 2008, a three-module personal safety series DVD was premiered in Arizona to the BMTF members.

### **Working Along the United States-Mexico Border DVD**

This DVD is intended for Federal, State, local and tribal agencies working along the United States-Mexico border. The borderlands are not just the land immediately adjacent to the international border but stretch about 100 miles north when defined in terms of the international smuggling and border security issues. Therefore, the border encompasses the land that extends 100 miles north of the international line all the way from San Diego, California to Brownsville, Texas. Thus, employees working long distances away from the border are subject to the same safety concerns as those working right along the border.

The DVD captures the knowledge and skills of employees who have years of experience working near the border but cannot provide all the answers on how to deal with border issues since they are numerous

and constantly changing. In addition, each land management agency has a different mission and policies. This DVD is designed to raise your awareness and stimulate discussion about the border situation. Each agency and the supervisor of field units will need to identify the specific issues they face in their area and determine the policies and actions that need to be taken by their employees.

The DVD has three modules that identify the current safety issues facing employees, interns, volunteers, and firefighters who work in the borderlands and the work practices that reduce on-the-job risks. Through viewing these modules and participating in agency discussions, supervisors and employees can increase their personal safety.

In Module I, "Understanding the Situation," experienced employees talk about the problems they and their agencies face from drug smuggling and illegal immigration. The module is divided into three parts:

- The Nature of the Problem
- Impacts on Land Management Agencies
- Impacts on Employees

33 minutes

In Module II, "Protecting Yourself," employees discuss what they watch for and what they do to keep safe while working along the border. The module is divided into three parts:

- Heading out to the Field
- Working in the Field
- Dealing with the Emotional Toll

47 minutes

In Module III, "Fighting Fire," firefighters talk about the additional problems they face when conducting prescribed burns or fighting wildfires near the border. The module is divided into two parts:

- Impacts on Firefighters
- Special Precautions When Fighting Fire

27 minutes

MTDC and the BMTF will supply copies of the DVD to train employees along the entire border. This DVD should help reduce safety risks for employees, interns, and volunteers, when combined with other agency training materials.

You can obtain copies of the DVD by contacting:

Forest Service  
Missoula Technology and Development Center  
5785 Highway 10 West  
Missoula, MT 59808  
Phone: 406-329-3978  
E-mail: [wo\\_mtdc\\_pubs@fs.fed.us](mailto:wo_mtdc_pubs@fs.fed.us)