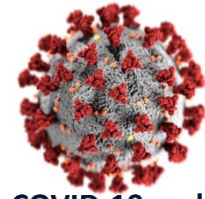


Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: COVID-19 Mitigations
Date: July 2020
Location: July Complex
Modoc National Forest
California



**COVID-19 and
Fire Season 2020 Lessons**
For the latest on COVID-19 visit
[CDC.gov/COVID19](https://www.cdc.gov/COVID19)

COVID-19 Lessons and Insights from the July Complex on the Modoc National Forest



Managing the July Complex included the additional challenge of implementing and managing COVID-19 protocol and precautions to avoid the spread of the virus among fire personnel as well as members of the adjacent communities.

Background

The July Complex on the Modoc National Forest was the first Type 1 federal wildfire incident in California this year. Four separate lightning-caused fires comprised this complex. Suppression resources starting responding to these fires on July 22. Initially, a Type 2 Incident Management Team was ordered and was on scene for two weeks.

At the height of this incident's complexity, the Type 2 IMT was supplemented with a Type 1 IMT Command and General Staff for five days.

At the peak of the July Complex's fire activity, approximately 2,000 resources were assigned to this incident—all of whom would need to be managed and guided in the proper mitigations for limiting the potential transmission of COVID-19.

The July Complex burned approximately 83,000 acres, including private land and lands administered by: the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. A traditional Forest location for the Incident Command Post was established, as well as two spike camps.



Column from the July Complex.



Social distancing on the July Complex.

Lessons

The Forest-chosen Incident Command Post location (“Ambrose”) had served many Type 1 and Type 2 ICPs in the past. However, this year this location proved to be especially challenging due to:

- ❖ Heightened information technology (IT) requirements for communications, data, internet and cellular capacity.
 - Modules were expected to send a representative to briefings to reduce crowds. Sometimes copy products like IAPs ran out before everyone got a copy or enough copies to take back to their crews. Firefighters were encouraged to attend virtually or to use QR code scanners to download products.
 - Subsequent additional mixing of people occurred due to the need for IMT members to work in town at the Supervisors Office.
 - Creative ways to reduce crowds generally require additional IT capacity, such as QR codes, virtual meetings, video and radio broadcasts to remote locations, etc.
- ❖ COVID-19 mitigations and challenges with social distancing were evident with the location and camp layout.



COVID-19 mitigations on the July Complex.
 Top Photo – temperature check.
 Bottom Photo – sanitizing.



Other Key Lessons, Suggestions and Insights

- ❖ The Forest needs to prepare more thoroughly during the off-season in order to pre-determine options for ICPs and spike camps regarding the IT and COVID-19 mitigations and challenges (discussed above).
- ❖ An established Forest Incident Management Organization (IMO) IC and Deputy IC were extremely valuable— they also directly connected with local health officials.



Social distancing at a July Complex public meeting attended by residents from Tule Lake and other surrounding areas.

- ❖ The IMT had previously established a “COVID-19 Task Force” which was also valuable despite several key members not being filled due to resource ordering challenges.
- ❖ Delays in ordering and purchasing led to additional COVID-19 risk and exposure to firefighters because facilities took longer than usual to get established.
- ❖ Contact tracing is complicated and is important to take place immediately upon potential COVID-19 exposure. Good records from the beginning with regards to resource daily assignments are critical (IAPs, etc.).
- ❖ COVID-19 mitigations add to incident complexity and played a role in this incident’s Type 1 complexity rating.
- ❖ Creative adjustments to tackle incident complexity are important—more reasons to avoid the traditional handoff and complete swapping of full IMTs.
- ❖ Well-prepared and experienced medical staff are critical.
- ❖ Isolation facilities are critical on-site or nearby, with backup capacity already identified if needed.
- ❖ Partners, other organizations and agencies all have unique COVID-19 policies, which complicate proper reactions when potential cases arise.



Firefighters observing the July Complex.

- ❖ Host units and agencies should anticipate significant extra costs for COVID mitigation.
 - This is reflected not only in the logistics and medical requirements but also in the fire suppression techniques this season (full suppression, minimize smoke, minimize fire duration and length, ignore potential beneficial fire effects and opportunities).
- ❖ Camp planning and layout is extremely important for COVID-19 mitigation. Getting it right the first time is also critical.
 - Head's up to basic bottlenecks: radio cloning, food lines, paths to meeting locations, finance and mob/de-mob.
- ❖ Political questions will arise. It is therefore important to involve cooperators early and develop plans with their involvement. We received questions why our Modoc National Forest firefighters were seen across the state line in Klamath Falls, despite the obvious answer that it was the closest full-service community to the complex's largest fire.



Apropos signs of our times at the July Complex ICP.



This RLS was submitted by:

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