

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
FOREST SERVICE

Los Padres NF

REPLY TO: 6170 Safety

December 16, 1971

SUBJECT: Romero Fire



TO: Regional Forester

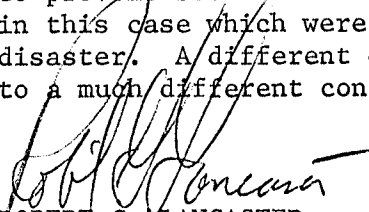
Reference is made to your November 30th request concerning why there was no Safety Officer, as such, assigned to the Romero fire.

A copy of my August 20, 1971, recommendation concerning the role of the Safety Officer is attached. We were following that policy during the Romero fire with the following modifications:

1. One of my major roles as Forest Supervisor during the fire (and at the time of the tragedy) was essentially that of a fire safety inspector. This is why I maintained close contact with Assistant Deputy State Forester Garv Nash who was heading up the Division of Forestry effort, Bob McDonald from S&PF, and Byron Carniglia from the State Forester's office.

2. I saw Jay Peterson's role essentially the same as mine, with our advice and counsel continually being made available to Fire Boss Lyon. Neither of us was hesitant in playing this role, nor was there any reluctance on the Fire Boss's part in accepting it.

In summary, I don't believe a "Fire Safety Officer" would have changed the tragic results of a safety failure that resulted in this tragedy in any way. Our whole philosophy of safety is based on experienced, seasoned, fireline personnel acting to maintain an adequate margin to prevent such an accident. Obviously, there were many small failures in this case which were cumulative in effect and inevitably led to the disaster. A different decision at any earlier point would have led to a much different conclusion, in my opinion.

  
ROBERT G. LANCASTER  
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure

FOREST SERVICE

Region Five

REPLY TO: 6170 Safety

November 30, 1971

SUBJECT: Romero Fire



TO: Forest Supervisor  
Los Padres N.F.

Enclosed is a self explanatory memo from the W.O. Your Personnel department has already begun to gather most of the data for you. However, it seems you will personally have to answer their final question concerning the Safety Officer.

*Richard M. Pomeroy*  
RICHARD M. POMEROY  
Regional Personnel Officer  
Division of Personnel Management

Enclosures

RECEIVED  
LOS PADRES N.F.

DEC 2 1971

FILE  
COPY

X ACTION  
INFORMATION

REF: INITIAL: DTE.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Forest Spvr.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Deputy F. S.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Supervisor Officer
<input type="checkbox"/>	Range-WLM-WS
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lands
<input type="checkbox"/>	Recreation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	PCO
<input type="checkbox"/>	Engineer
<input type="checkbox"/>	DR's
<input type="checkbox"/>	

WO

NOV 22 1971

DIVISION OF  
PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

REPLY TO: 6170 Safety

November 16, 1971

SUBJECT: Romero Fire



TO: Regional Forester, R-5

Please forward the following information for these men who worked on the Romero fire.

Jerry Berry	- Line Boss
Doug Campbell	- " "
Doug Hayden	- Liason officer
Bob Nelson	- Scout
Thomas Klepperich	Tractor Boss
Ben Lyon	- Fire Boss

1. All clock hours on October 6 and 7.
2. The justification statement for any of these exceeding 16 hours consecutively (including travel to the fire).
3. Who authorized the excessive hours?

Please justify the failure to use a safety officer inasmuch as this is national policy.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "O. M. Jackson".

O. M. JACKSON  
Director Personnel Management

FOREST SERVICE

Los Padres NF

REPLY TO: 5130 Fire Suppression  
(6170)

August 20, 1971

SUBJECT: Fire Safety (Your ltr. 8/9)



TO: Regional Forester

It appears that we may be attempting to solve a problem of performance in fire safety through a reorganization approach. Sufficient experience and a no-nonsense approach to safety rule enforcement by each level in the fire control team is the key.

FCO Lyon developed his thoughts concerning this recurring problem. I am quoting his effort, as I agree with him that the attitude of each supervisor (regardless of whether he is functioning in the line, plans, service, or command role) is a key to safe performance.

I have always felt very strongly that safety is a line responsibility, and that a separate safety agent tends to "relieve" the line, when line should not be so "relieved." During assignments of Fire Boss, I have noted that some Safety Officers have made excellent contributions. I have also noted that some Safety Officers have been a detriment because of their interference with management. (It's difficult to fight off the Godly quality of a safety recommendation, especially in front of groups.)

I believe that when we add a Safety Officer, we are saying to the line, "relax, boys, this guy will take care of the safety problems." But if we fully intend to redeem our responsibilities as line officers on a fire, we don't want him. I have often thought that people who strongly advocated having the safety officer were really saying to themselves, "I ought to go on record as favoring this because we all know how important safety is."

An argument in favor of the Safety Officer goes like this: "...The Fire Boss, Line Boss, etc. are too busy with getting the fire taken care of. A Safety Officer, with all his time devoted to Safety can plug the gaps. Also, fireline people can see the "Safety Officer" decal on his hard hat and are reminded to work safely...."

My views here are that a safe operation is the by-product of an efficient and well managed job. If we're too busy to have

this kind of operation, maybe we have the wrong people in some of the jobs. When I see a "Safety Officer" decal on a hard hat I wonder if the Fire Boss should be wearing that decal.

I do believe we need a "fire safety inspector" and that this individual must be one of the most experienced and qualified men on the line. However, in most instances we are describing the crew, sector, line, etc. boss role. It really can't be delegated because of other demands on his time.

Essentially, I also favor proposal #1. In complex or especially dangerous situations, a separate staff function reporting directly to the fire boss may be desirable. However, he would have to function as a line officer for safety matters much the same way as an aircraft command pilot decides whether or not his ship is safe to fly after receiving a command to go from point A to point Z. The choice of routes, height to fly, etc. in the end is also subject to the pilot's absolute discretion when matters of safety are at issue.

ROBERT G. LANCASTER  
ROBERT G. LANCASTER  
Forest Supervisor

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
FOREST SERVICE  
Region Five

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REPLY TO: 5130 - Fire Suppression  
(6170)

August 9, 1971

SUBJECT: Fire Safety



TO: Forest Supervisors, Chief - Division of Fire Control,  
Service Centers

REPLY DUE AUGUST 25, 1971

During the recent Fire Control Officers' Seminar in Riverside and in our Servicewide meeting with the Chief, considerable interest was shown concerning the ineffectiveness of the Fire Safety Officer position as the position now functions.

Proposals from various sources for improving accident prevention on fires include the following:

1. Eliminate the Fire Safety Officer position entirely and give the entire responsibility for safety to line officers throughout the fire organization.
2. Retain the Fire Safety Officer position but consider:
  - a. The location in the fire organization where the position should be placed:
    - (1) In the Plans Section where the position is presently located.
    - (2) As a separate staff function reporting directly to the Fire Boss.
    - (3) Under the Forest Supervisor, but advising the Fire Boss in safety matters. The position would have a similar relation to the Forest Supervisor and the Fire Boss as in the case of the Comptroller.
  - b. Provide specialists under the Fire Safety Officer to concentrate on known safety problem areas, i.e., aircraft accidents and fire burn cases.

- c. Provide high caliber line personnel (such as Line Boss qualified personnel on Class E, F, and G fires and Division Boss qualified personnel on other fires) to fill the Fire Safety Officer position.
- d. Provide Regional training for Fire Safety Officers as we do for some other positions in the fire organization. Include Fire Safety Officers in Fire Team Training, including simulator sessions.

I would like your personal comments by August 25, 1971 on how we can redeem our fire safety responsibility most effectively. Fire fatalities have accounted for 72% of Region Five employee fatalities since 1940. Fifty-seven of these fatalities were burn cases. Fire suppression accidents also account for more Region Five injuries numerically than any other function. Prevention of fire connected injuries is a fertile field in which to concentrate our safety efforts. Increased effectiveness in preventing these injuries deserves your personal attention. I am open to any suggestions from the Field which may reduce accidents on fires.



NORMAN J. FARRELL  
Acting Regional Forester'