



## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Wildland Fire Best Management Practices



As first responders and fire leaders, we need to be strategic in the way we mitigate COVID-19 virus risk by taking practical and effective measures to avoid exposure to the virus in order to keep our workforce healthy and productive.

The following mitigations are recommended:

### General Behaviors

1. Continue to monitor and follow CDC recommendations, DOI guidance posted on the “All DOI Employees COVID-19 Information Portal”:  
<https://doimsp.sharepoint.com/sites/doicov?CT=1584715897369&OR=OWA-NT&CID=85677415-f130-7431-3ccd-da8a7f70bef4> and FWS guidance.
2. Adopt an “insulate the module as one” mentality. Due to the nature of our business, wildland firefighters are often unable to maintain recommended social distances when accomplishing our mission. It is crucial for modules to stay healthy as a unit, so think of each module (engine module, IA or Rx module, etc.) as one individual/family unit. This is no different from our desire to insulate our families at home from COVID-19; we must also insulate our fire family.
3. Monitor each other: watching for symptoms and taking your temperature regularly are the best methods for identifying the virus early. Close proximity, when required, is not an issue if everyone on the crew is healthy.
4. Insulate mission-critical fire staff (including dispatchers, warehouse and support staff) from the general public, office staff, and nonessential partners. This may mean restricting certain areas and creating physical separation between modules, support functions and other mission essential functions. Consider designating restrooms, breakrooms and traditionally shared workspaces, if practical, for specific functions.
5. Most importantly, impress upon your fire family, personal responsibility off hours to reduce the potential to bring the virus into the workplace. Provide clear leader’s intent and expectations of fire staff on their off-duty responsibilities to protect themselves and their crews from exposure. This should include following CDC guidelines; avoiding restaurants, bars and crowds larger than 10 people, self-monitoring, reporting potential exposure, and staying home from work if exposed or sick.

### Home Unit – General Preparedness Activities

1. Physical training should be conducted outdoors rather than using indoor training facilities. Stagger PT time for modules if necessary. Maintain social distancing in shared locker rooms and ensure shared facilities are thoroughly sanitized.
2. Daily readiness activities (operational briefings, safety meetings, weather reports, staffing plans), if practical, should be done in well ventilated facilities or outdoors.
3. Consider telework options for modules once preparedness activities are complete, if local fire conditions allow.
4. Consider alternative methods to present and attend training (online, virtual, etc.).

5. Clean work areas and vehicles frequently and between operational periods. Make necessary cleaning supplies readily available.

### **Home Unit – Elevated Fire Danger Activities**

1. Consider staggered shifts for different modules, dispatchers and support staff. However, avoid crew member swaps or rotations if at all possible. Maintain the “insulate the module as one” mentality.
2. Fire managers should work closely with local, regional and national line leadership to evaluate local fire conditions and consider implementing fire restrictions and area closures earlier than normal to reduce the potential for human-caused fires.
3. Fire detection patrols should be done by module to ensure they remain insulated.
4. Consider virtual or remote prevention activities and messaging.
5. Increase fire information signage and ensure fire reporting information is well posted at visitor centers and other common gathering areas.

### **Initial Attack, Fuels Management and Project Work**

Initial Attack should be the highest priority for investment of resources. We must emphasize the need to catch fires during initial attack and prevent long duration fires.

1. Weigh the risk of responding in multiple vehicles; **driving is still one of our highest-risk activities.**
2. Stock vehicles with disinfecting wipes, hand sanitizer, and soap.
3. Consider radio or remote briefings for incoming resources, instead of individual briefings.
4. Do not share PPE, flight helmets, radios or other equipment.
5. Use MREs, single-serve sack or boxed meals instead of food lines. Evaluate drinking water supply options; don't share cubees if possible.
6. Provide extra handwashing stations if possible.
7. Disinfect vehicles and equipment, and wash PPE after each response.
8. Consider more rest between responses. Typical 2:1 work/rest mitigation may not be enough to keep people healthy this year.

Prescribed fire activities, if implemented, must occur in strategic locations which mitigate wildfire risk. Programs must identify the most effective and appropriate activities to reduce wildfire risk while considering all types of treatment options and the ability to effectively accomplish them.

In particular, prioritize projects which most clearly meet established performance and accountability measures as presented in the Service's Fuels Management Allocation and Accountability System (FAAS) User Guide, in particular those:

1. Occurring in the FAAS Hazard zone, specifically Very High and High risk areas, and
2. Protecting values at various geographic scales identified through collaborative efforts with communities, counties, state, and federal stakeholders such as those highlighted in local Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs), equivalent plans (CWPP/E), or agency-prepared plans.

Reducing wildfire risk through fuels management activities and safely and efficiently responding to wildfire are core functions of the Service's wildland fire management program. Maintain these tenants in planning and prioritization processes and while evaluating go/no go checklists for prescribed fire deemed to be mission critical. Any escaped prescribed fire or escaped portion of a prescribed fire will impact the interagency wildland fire response capability and must be addressed in the go/no go process.

### **Severity**

1. Evaluate and pre-identify hotels and food vendors based on cleaning practices.
2. Use single-serve sack or boxed meals, take-out, drive-through, etc. instead of dining in restaurants.
3. Consider positioning resources in non-typical locations than in the past, i.e. perhaps not at the same station as local resources.

### **Extended Attack/Large Fire**

1. Weigh the risk of responding in multiple vehicles; **driving is still one of our highest-risk activities.**
2. Consider closed camps.
3. Consider non-traditional fire camps with an emphasis on modular separation
  - a. Eat and brief outdoors and designate larger areas than normal for both.
  - b. Consider eating in shifts with sanitization between shifts. Do not allow lines. Do not allow self-serve eating models.
4. Camps should be designed so crews can maintain separation from each other:
  - a. Consider separate "pods" for each crew, to include sleeping areas, restroom facilities, and eating areas.
  - b. Consider each crew maintaining self-sufficiency.
  - c. If common eating areas must be used, consider eating in shifts and cleaning between shifts. Also consider modifying typical feeding procedures (i.e. no salad bars), use single-serve sack, boxed meals or MREs.
  - d. Utilize remote/radio briefings or expand briefing areas to accommodate 6 foot spacing.
  - e. Order extra handwashing stations and portable restrooms. Consider shower and laundry units.
  - f. Consider if IMT or camp functions can be accomplished remotely.
  - g. Maintain ice chest/cooler cleanliness by cleaning hands prior to use.
  - h. Expectations of regular shower use, when available, by firefighters should be conveyed to personnel.
5. Clean or change PPE often; this is not the year to proudly wear dirty Nomex.
6. Plan shifts to allow for more rest than historical norms. Consider more rest between responses.
7. Plan operations to reduce smoke exposure. This includes significantly limiting mop-up.
8. Emphasize strategies with low resource demand and high likelihood of success.
9. If incidents are more than a day's drive from the home unit, support and encourage R&R at the incident to reduce responders' exposure to the virus during travel home and back to the next incident.
10. Strongly encourage self-isolation, if practical, for firefighters returning from extended attack/large fire support incidents to protect family members from potential exposure.