# NATURAL COVER FIREFIGHTING

## PURPOSE

To establish procedures for the safe and effective extinguishment of natural cover fires.

## PROCEDURE

### 1. Response Considerations

A. While enroute evaluate the following:

i. Fuel: Light, heavy, crown.

ii. Weather: Wind speed, direction, time of day.

iii. Topography: Slope and gradient, natural and manmade barriers.

iv. Resources; Resources enroute, specialized resources (helicopter, dozer, etc.).

B. When approaching the fire area, think LACES:

i. **L**ookout.

ii. **A**wareness

iii. **C**ommunications.

iv. **E**scape Route.

v. **S**afety Zone.

### 2. Arriving at the Fire

A. Vehicles should be parked in a safe accessible location pointing away from the fire. Windows should be closed and keys in the ignition.

B. Determine the location of Safety Zones and Escape Routes.

C. Recon the fire thoroughly before committing to an attack strategy or committing resources.

D. Give an initial size-up upon arrival, followed by a detailed size-up based on recon observations. Size-up considerations:

i. What is the fire behavior and rate of spread?

ii. Is the fire spotting?

iii. What is the size of the fire?

iv. What is the topography?

v. What are the fuel types?

vi. Are structure or high value areas threatened?

vii. Are there any natural or existing barriers?

viii. Are there any special safety hazards?

ix. What is the fire's potential?

x. Have enough firefighting resources been dispatched?

**3. Fire Control Strategies**

Fire attack may involve one or both of the following strategies. It is imperative that an anchor point is secured.

A. Direct attack:

i. Can be used initially on most small fires.

ii. Attack from burned area and flanks toward head.

iii. Involves greater danger to personnel.

B. Indirect attack:

i. Take advantage of natural and manmade barriers.

ii. Fire line should be continuous, to bare mineral soil.

iii. Only set back fires if properly trained.

iv. Use earthmoving or farming equipment when possible.

**4. Assessment**

A. Command should view the fire from a point where a complete picture of the fire can be obtained. If this is not feasible, consider using scouts.

B. After resources have been deployed and control actions have begun, continue assessment of the fire, gather information, and determine fire cause.

C. Observe "watch out" situations (see IRPG & other publications).

**5. Fire Control Tactics**

A. Indirect attack: Constructing a line away from the fire edge taking advantage of breaks in topography, fuel, and natural barriers.

B. Direct attack: Extinguishment techniques applied directly to the fire's edge:

i. Mobile attack.

ii. Progressive hoselay.

iii. Pincer: Companies attack the fire from the flanks, encircle the fire, and meet at the head of the fire.

iv. Tandem: Companies working on the same flank will attack the fire perimeter. Second company backs-up the primary attack crew and extinguishes spot fires and mops-up.

v. Envelopment: Several companies working together to encircle the fire perimeter. May work on the same flank, but will have designated fire perimeter assignment.

C. Burnout Operations

i. Only to be done if ordered by IC.

ii. Must be performed by trained and experienced personnel.

**6. Structure Protection**

A. Level of protection may be dictated by the operational mode and resources available. Consider calling for “strike teams” or “task forces”.

B. Determine “defensible space” and triage the structure into one of the three categories:

i. Needs little or no attention.

ii. Defensible but needs protection.

iii. Indefensible

C. Structure protection tactics fall into one of the three categories:

i. Full containment – The fire can be stopped before it reaches the structure.

1. Construct a control line around the structure or tie into an existing control line.
2. Burnout.

ii. Partial containment – Firefighters can modify, diminish, or steer the fire around the structure.

1. Backfire from control line.
2. Attack portions of the fire as it passes to steer.
3. Pay attention to mop-up after fire passes.

iii. No containment – Fire arrives before crew can do any prep work, or the fire is too intense for direct attack.

1. Protect structure as best as possible with hoselines.
2. Retreat to safety zone if situation becomes untenable and return once fire front passes to extinguish any fire.

D. Refer to wildland/urban interface “watch out situations”.

**KEY CONSIDERATIONS**

- Early consideration of additional resources (ODF, USFS, BLM, etc…).
- Time it will take to construct a control line.
- Rehab needs.
- Consider use of foam.
- Be aware of rapidly changing conditions.

# NATURAL COVER FIREFIGHTING WATCHOUT SITUATIONS

1. Fire not scouted and sized up.
2. In country not seen in daylight.
3. Safety Zones and escape routes not identified.
4. Unfamiliar with weather and local behavior influencing fire behavior.
5. Uniformed on strategy, tactics and hazards.
6. Instructions and assignments not clear.
7. No communication link with crew members or supervisor.
8. Construction line without safe anchor point.
9. Building fireline downhill with fire below.
10. Attempting frontal assault on fire.
11. Unburned fuel between you and the fire.
12. Cannot see main fire, not in contact with someone who can.
13. On a hillside where rolling material can ignite fuel below.
14. Weather becoming hotter and drier.
15. Wind increases and/or changes direction.
16. Getting frequent spot fires across line.
17. Terrain and fuels make escape to Safety Zones difficult.
18. Taking a nap near the fireline.