



21 March 2020

TO: Fire Management Board Members

FROM: Leon Ben Jr., Chair, Fire Management Board

SUBJECT: Adjustments to Wildland Fire Preparedness Activities for the 2020 Fire Year in response to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic

The purpose of this memo is to provide the interagency wildland fire community with guidance on adjustments to wildland fire preparedness activities for the 2020 Fire Year. These activities include: Medical Clearance, Work Capacity Test (WCT), and RT-130, Wildland Fire Safety Training Annual Refresher (WFSTAR).

The Fire Management Board (FMB) has carefully analyzed the risk of responder exposure to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in relationship to the need to evaluate the medical, physical, and training requirements of wildland firefighters as part of annual fire management preparedness. We distinguished requirements into two categories: 1) Employees new to the federal firefighting workforce, and 2) Incumbent/returning firefighters and firefighters who have transferred from one federal Bureau to another. To this end, the following alternatives will be implemented effective immediately. Agencies may elect more stringent direction if deemed prudent.

Employees New to the Federal Firefighting Workforce

- Medical Clearance: Obtain clearance through standard agency onboarding process.
 - DOI Agencies: new hires will be required to complete baseline exams. If baseline exams are not possible to complete due to COVID-19 impacts, updated direction will be issued by individual agencies.
 - USFS: Effective immediately, any employee with responses on the eMedical Health Screening Questionnaire (HSQ) that indicates that they must be cleared to the WCT by OF-178 Exam will temporarily not be required to complete a new OF-178 exam. Any employee who would normally complete an OF-178 exam will be directed by their unit HSQ Coordinator to provide the USFS Medical Qualifications Office with additional information in order to obtain a temporary medical clearance to the WCT for 2020.
- Work Capacity Test (WCT): Required to complete any related light, moderate, or arduous work capacity test.
 - Discourage reuse or sharing of pack test vests.
 - Encourage use of weight appropriate bladder bags or individually issued fireline packs.
- Basic Firefighter Training: Required to complete S-130, Firefighter Training; S-190, Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior; L-180, Human Factors in the Wildland Fire Service; IS-700, An Introduction to the National Incident Management System; and ICS-100, Introduction to the Incident Command System, and fire shelter proficiency training. The fire shelter training should be implemented using a standard fire shelter that no longer meets service parameters or a practice fire shelter as a one-person, one-time use.

Incumbent/Returning Firefighters/Transferred Federal Firefighters

- Medical Clearance: Required to complete a self-certification through their agency medical standards program.
 - DOI Agencies:
 - The 3-year (36-month) periodicity requirement for all DOI exams expiring in 2020 is extended until December 31, 2020. Firefighters who were previously *Qualified* or *Qualified with Risk Mitigation* or *Waiver* that are due for a periodic exam may choose to complete a self-certification in lieu of completing a periodic exam. Upon expiration of the interim policy firefighters shall come back into compliance with exam periodicity.
 - All DOI non-qualified determinations will be required to follow the standard risk mitigation/waiver/review process. You must have been qualified via a risk mitigation, waiver or medical officer review and be considered medically qualified before functioning in an arduous capacity.
 - USFS:
 - Effective immediately, any employee with responses on the eMedical Health Screening Questionnaire (HSQ) that indicates that they must be cleared to the WCT by OF-178 Exam will temporarily not be required to complete a new OF-178 exam. Any employee who would normally complete an OF-178 exam will be directed by their unit HSQ Coordinator to provide the USFS Medical Qualifications Office with additional information in order to obtain a temporary medical clearance to the WCT for 2020.
- Work Capacity Tests (WCTs) are suspended for 2020. Employees will provide the local Incident Qualifications and Certification System (IQCS) account manager proof of medical clearance. Upon receipt of proof of medical clearance, the IQCS account manager will input a WCT competency based on the previously attained 2019 level (light, moderate or arduous). IQCS account managers will include appropriate documentation in the employees training record.
- RT-130, Wildland Fire Safety Training Annual Refresher (WFSTAR): Employees who have not completed RT-130 to date will be awarded the RT-130 competency. The competency will be awarded from their current expiration date identified in IQCS. This action will be implemented nationally through the agency's National Training Officer. The following actions are recommended in lieu of the formal training:
 - Complete a self-study refresher utilizing the WFSTAR videos and support materials. Employees should include topics that focus on entrapment avoidance and related case studies, current issues, and other hazards and safety issues.
(<https://www.nwcg.gov/publications/training-courses/rt-130/wfstar-catalog>).
 - To compensate for the hands-on fire shelter training, employees are encouraged to watch the "New Generation Fire Shelter" video (<https://www.nwcg.gov/committees/fire-shelter-and-personal-protective-equipment-subcommittee>).
 - Predicted service information (<https://www.predictiveservices.nifc.gov/predictive.htm>)
 - Utilize content from the Lesson Learned Center (<https://www.wildfirelessons.net/home>).

These exceptions apply to all Administratively Determined (AD) employees as well as applicable crew, water handling (engines and water tenders), and equipment contracts and agreements.

Background: Many wildland fire position qualifications require the completion of the RT-130, medical exam, and WCT. Based on the current situation and guidance related to COVID-19, the goal is to reduce impact and exposure to our employees while maintaining our ability to respond to incidents and carry out mission critical wildland fire activities.

Distribution:

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