

Safety Alert OF THE MONTH

August 2014

PLEASE PASS THIS ON TO PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS IN BC'S FOREST INDUSTRY

Preparedness and Reporting – Your Best Fire Tools

“No, I don’t think you’re wrong, Tom. I caught a faint whiff of smoke on my way into the block this morning, too. Let’s take a few minutes and check it out.”

“Sure thing, Darren. I’ll let the crew know where we’re headed. We should stop by the fire tool cache and grab a little extra gear just in case it turns out to be something. Have you got the satellite phone?”

“I do. Actually, why don’t we check with the crew working in Upper Twin Creek; maybe they can see something we can’t from down here?”

A busy fire season and high fire danger ratings present a new set of hazards for forestry operations. Changing forest fuel types and dramatic weather patterns (e.g. wind and storm events, heat waves, etc.) seem to be elevating the risk of catastrophic fires. But, no matter where you operate, two things – preparedness and reporting – can make the difference between a small blaze that is quickly brought under control, and a wildfire emergency.

Preparedness

Being *ready* to respond promptly and effectively is key. Given the limited resources most loggers have on site, you have a much better chance of controlling and extinguishing a small fire. Delays due to disorganization and hurried, ineffective actions can allow a small fire to quickly grow to dangerous proportions beyond the capacity of your crew and equipment. There are several aspects to consider:

- **Training** – Before you can direct employees to engage in fire-fighting activities, they must be knowledgeable of the work and the associated hazards they may encounter, as well as the actions they can take to control those hazards. *S-100 Basic Fire Suppression and Safety* with the necessary *S-100A* annual refresher is the training standard.
- **Physical Capability** – Firefighting can be physically exhausting work. Equipment operators that don’t do a lot of exercise may be able to lug a pump to the water hole, but if the wind changes direction can they quickly move to a safe location? Before asking your crew to engage in firefighting, assess each one’s physical capability. Err on the side of caution.



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- **Practice – S-100 training includes a day of field activities with fire equipment and tools. That’s a good start. You can vastly improve your crew’s ability to respond by conducting “fire drills” and practicing your Emergency Response Plan on your block. These are great opportunities for the crew to hone their skills; they usually identify weaknesses in your plan, and opportunities for improving it. As importantly, crew members understand respective roles and each is better prepared to calmly and effectively undertake their assignment.**
- **Check Equipment Regularly – Have someone confirm that vehicles and heavy equipment are equipped with necessary fire tools. Do the backpack pumps have water in them? Are nozzles and hoses still where they belong? Fire up the pump; make sure it pushes out water.**
- **Situational Awareness – Training and practice are a good start, but you have to translate those skills and knowledge and apply them to your specific situation. Maybe it’s just a *little* fire, but if it’s amongst nasty windfalls and the water source is in a steep ravine, you need to think carefully about who, if anyone, on your crew is up to the assignment. Sure, Joe says he’ll do it, but he’s at the end of a tough shift on a blazing hot day. Is this the right time to let him head into another physically demanding situation? Pause for a few moments; consider the variables (weather, terrain, your people, values at risk), develop some options, and make a plan that fits the situation. Have a plan to evacuate your crew if necessary.**

Reporting

Even if it’s only a small fire, take a few minutes and report it to the Wildfire Management Branch at **1-800-663-5555** or call ***5555** toll free on most cellular networks.



The information you provide helps the fire management centre determine the nature of response – the actions they undertake and what resources are sent to help fight the fire. When you call, the operator taking the call will ask you the following.

- **your phone number – Let the operator know how they can maintain contact with you. If other communication modes (e.g. 2-way radio, satellite phone on site, etc.) are available, provide that information along with names of people they can contact there.**



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- **the location of the fire** – Provide a geographical location, reference nearest community, water body, access roads, etc. If you have information about the terrain/topography, offer that as well.
- **what the fire is burning** – Is it in a stand of beetle-killed pine trees, old hemlock and balsam, or a young spruce plantation?
- **the size of the fire** – Estimate the area the fire covers in terms of metres (e.g. 50m by 200m).
- **how quickly the fire is spreading** – Expressed in terms of metres per minute. For example, a low vigor surface fire spreads at about 1.5 m/min; a Rank 5 crown fire can spread at 6 to 18 m/min.
- **colour of the smoke** – White to grey smoke suggests a low intensity Rank 2 fire. Black to copper-coloured smoke suggests a more intense Rank 5 fire. Check out the resources section for a link to more information on fire ranking.
- **whether there are values or lives at risk** – How close is the fire to a camp or community? Other forestry or industrial operations? A critical road or bridge?

As with any emergency, the reporting and communication pieces are essential for successful outcomes. Two-way radio communications between your work site and fire authorities may be unreliable. If that's your only choice, you'll probably have to implement a relay system (e.g. use the 2-way radio to convey info to someone with a cell-phone, or establish radio contact with someone at the office in town). A satellite phone is a good option for most locations. Be sure to designate an individual to be the contact person so that accurate information is transmitted and received in a reliable and timely manner.

Most logging companies are well prepared to deal with emergencies and are taking proactive steps to safeguard our working forest from forest fires.

"That's right, Lisa. Looks like another weekend camper headed home before fully extinguishing their campfire. It's not a big blaze but with the weather and wind changing, I think it could push the fire up the draw to where our buncher is working. We can get our water tank near enough using the 3700 Road."

"Thanks, Darren. I'll let the crew know and contact the Fire Centre. Wanda and Rob will come over with the water truck and gear right away. I'll get the Twin Creek crew to evacuate the buncher operator and to head over there to back us up."



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Resources:

[Wildland Fire Lessons Center](#) - fire training support, webinars, newsletter

[Wildfire Management Branch](#) - list of recognized S-100 instructors

[BC Fire Danger Rating](#) - current fire hazard information

[Wildfire Regulation](#) - regulatory requirements under the Wildfire Act

[Fire Rank](#) - images and characteristics of fires ranked 1 through 6

[Guidelines for Fire Suppression Systems and Tools in BC](#) - suggested tools and equipment

[Fire Fighting Safety Resources](#) - link to US Forest Service fire safety resources

