

Guidance for Incident PIOs

Sample verbiage for leader's intent to incident PIOs, generally provided with Delegation of Authority:

Incident PIOs may speak to incident-specific COVID-19 mitigations, based on approved interagency messaging available on the NIFC PIO Bulletin Board https://www.nifc.gov/PIO_bb/whats_new.html. Incident PIOs should coordinate with the agency administrator(s) to designate the appropriate spokesperson for questions about potential or confirmed exposures.

Suggested Items for Discussion Between Host Unit PAOs and PIOs and/or to be Included with IMT In-briefing Package

COVID-19 FAQs and Messaging Guidance for Host Unit PAOs and Incident PIOs 7/21/20 draft

I have a wildland fire incident on my unit. What can we talk about in terms of wildland fire and COVID-19?

- Due to the need for timely response in emergency situations, local unit and incident PIOs may speak to incident-specific COVID-19 mitigations and response, tiered from approved interagency messaging available on the NIFC PIO Bulletin Board https://www.nifc.gov/PIO_bb/whats_new.html.
 - Incident PIOs should incorporate related objectives from the Incident Action Plan and a summary of incident-specific mitigations.
 - Incident PIOs should communicate regularly with the host unit(s) public affairs officer(s) to keep them informed about the general number and type of media inquiries (local, regional, national, international, etc.).
- Incident PIOs should forward questions regarding the agency or interagency community as a whole to the regional and national communications office(s) for the host agency(s) involved or to the National Fire Information Center at 208-387-5050 or BLM_FA_NIFC_Comments@blm.gov.

A media outlet wants to do a Zoom interview to talk about COVID-19 and wildland firefighting. Can I provide one?

- If the request is incident-specific, incident PIOs may take the interview, following agency protocols (i.e. when using a DOI device, PIOs may accept an incoming Zoom call from the media but may not initiate a Zoom call).
- Refer questions about what mitigations the host agency and interagency wildland fire community have implemented regionally or nationally to the regional communications office contact(s) and/or the National Fire Information Center at 208-387-5050 or BLM_FA_NIFC_Comments@blm.gov.

The question about aircraft and fighting fires aggressively keeps coming up. What can we say?

- Incident PIOs may address incident-specific aviation information including:
 - Number of aircraft assigned to the incident and explaining how aircraft are supporting suppression operations where they can do so safely and effectively.
 - The best mix of tools for wildland firefighting includes ground and air resources. Aircraft alone do not put out wildfires. Retardant applied from large air tankers can slow the progress of a wildfire so firefighters on the ground can safely construct fireline.

- Questions about how many aircraft are available nationally should be directed to the National Fire Information Center at 208-387-5050 or BLM_FA_NIFC_Comments@blm.gov.

An outbreak of COVID-19 has happened at our incident (or there are rumors of one). What can we say?

- *Note: To ensure privacy, only personnel who may have been exposed will be contacted directly, as needed. Thus, incident PIOs may not be aware of potential COVID-19 exposures on an incident. If positive cases are confirmed, the regional or national office will designate a point of contact for media and will communicate with the lead incident PIO to ensure they are aware whom to direct questions to.*
- In the event of public or media questions related to a specific potential or confirmed exposure, incident PIOs should use incident within an incident protocols when answering this question. No names, no potentially identifying details. Incident PIOs should be prepared with a basic first message they can use while additional messages are being approved.
 - **What Happened?** In the event of potential wildland fire personnel infection, we follow the procedures in our response plan. Details on COVID-19 prevention and management during wildfires are available on <https://www.nwcg.gov/coronavirus>.
 - **How are you responding to a potential or confirmed exposure?** In the event of potential exposure, we work with local authorities and impacted employees to follow proper public health procedures to keep the public and one another safe.
 - **What precautions are firefighters taking to prevent COVID-19 exposure in local communities?** To keep firefighters and communities healthy and safe, all firefighters are asked to follow recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to reduce the spread of illness.
 - **Other specific questions about what crew? Where are they from? Etc.** We do not share personally identifiable information to ensure the medical privacy of our personnel. If potential exposures occur, potentially affected individuals are contacted directly, per local public health protocols.
- In the event of a COVID-19 related incident, all messaging should be coordinated through the appropriate state/local/host agency public health entities and regional communications office(s) for the incident host units/agencies and incident personnel agency(s) involved prior to release.
 - Generally regional office fire staff will identify and coordinate with key public affairs individuals. The lead media contact will ensure the incident management team (IMT) PIO has their contact info and understands to pass on all media requests.
 - Once a lead media contact has been established, incident PIOs should direct all questions related to the specific COVID-19 incident to the lead media contact to address.
 - Sample incident specific talking points:
 - To date, there have been no laboratory-confirmed positive COVID-19 testing results on this fire.
 - We have had persons that have been identified with symptoms associated with possible COVID-19, however there have been no positive cases reported and all known contacts that meet exposure criteria have been notified.
 - On [DATE] [an individual/crew/personnel] assigned to the [INCIDENT NAME] [reported possible COVID-19 symptoms / were identified as

someone who had been in previous close contact with a COVID-19 positive person in the course of their day job / etc.]. The [individual/crew/personnel] was/were [isolated and sent home for testing].

- [INSERT # PERSONNEL] assigned to the [INSERT FIRE NAME] were tested and confirmed positive for COVID-19. Of the [INSERT # PERSONNEL TESTED, # tested positive, # tested negative, and # are pending results. All have been quarantined in [INSERT STATE] and are being monitored daily. All testing and mitigation protocols have been followed.
- Taking photos/videos of wildland firefighters being tested for COVID-19 is discouraged to protect privacy. However, if outside entities involved in testing plan to take photos and videos, best practices include avoiding identifying features including faces and crew logos/graphics, including those on t-shirts and hats, tattoos, vehicles, etc.