

5 – Training & Qualifications

Introduction

Standards for Department of Interior (DOI) agencies, which may exceed the minimum standards established by NWCG, are coordinated through Interior Fire Coordination Committee (IFCC). Such additional standards will be approved by the agencies' Fire Directors, and implemented through the Incident Qualification and Certification System (IQCS).

Policy

It is agency policy that only qualified personnel will be assigned duties in wildland fire suppression or prescribed fire. All employees assigned dedicated fire program management responsibilities at the local, geographic area, or national level shall meet established interagency and agency competencies (knowledge, skills, and abilities) and associated qualifications. The National Wildfire Coordination Group (NWCG), *Wildland and Prescribed Fire Qualifications Systems Guide PMS 310-1* is the agencies' policy.

BLM – *BLM Manual 9215, Fire Training and Qualifications*, identifies the training and experience requirements for BLM personnel to perform jobs associated with the fire management program. The manual section also establishes state and field office responsibility for maintaining fire qualification records and position certification. BLM minimum qualification standards for wildland and prescribed fire are developed jointly with other federal and state agencies through the NWCG. These qualification standards are published in the *NWCG Wildland and Prescribed Fire Qualification System Guide, PMS 310-1*.

FWS – Reference *Service Manual 232 FW6, Firefighter Training and Fire Management Handbook, 1.5 Training, Qualifications and Certification for FWS* direction.

NPS – Reference *RM-18*, Chapter 6, Training, Qualifications, and Certification for NPS direction.

USFS – Standards which may exceed the minimum standards established by NWCG are identified in *FSH 5109.17*

Certification & Record Keeping

The Incident Qualification and Certification System (IQCS) is the DOI's fire qualifications and certification record keeping system. The master file report provided by the IQCS meets the agency requirement for maintaining fire qualification records. The system is designed to provide managers at the local, state/regional, and national levels with detailed qualification, experience, and training information needed to certify employees in wildland and prescribed fire positions. The IQCS is a tool to assist managers in certification decisions; it does not replace the manager's responsibility to

validate that employees meet all requirements for position performance based on standards.

A hard copy file folder will be kept for each employee. The contents will include, but are not limited to: training records for all agency required courses, evaluations from assignments, position Task Book verification, yearly updated IQCS forms, and Individual Employee Master File Report from IQCS.

BLM – All records will be stored and/or destroyed in accordance with agency policies, these policies can be found at www.blm.gov/nhp/records/blmgrs/subject.html

USFS – The Forest Service process for certification and record keeping is outlined in *FSH 5109.17*.

Certification of Non-Agency Personnel

Non-agency firefighters will be certified by state or local fire departments. The agency will not assist in the administration, or sponsor the work capacity test (WCT), as the certifying agency.

BLM – The agency may assist in the administration, or sponsor the WCT, as the certifying agency.

The Incident Qualifications and Certification Card (Red Card)

The agency administrator (or delegate) is responsible for annual certification of personnel serving in wildland and prescribed fire positions. Agency certification is issued annually in the form of an Incident Qualification Card (Red Card), which certifies that the individual is qualified to perform in a specified position. The Red Card must be reviewed for accuracy and signed by the agency administrator or delegated official. The agency administrator, fire manager, and individual are responsible for monitoring medical status, fitness, training, and performance, and for taking appropriate action to ensure the employee meets all position performance requirements.

Proper documentation of training, medical screening, and successful completion of the appropriate WCT must be accomplished. All Red Cards issued to agency employees, with the exception of EFF-paid or temporary employees at the FFT2 level, will be printed using the DOI IQCS. Red Cards issued to EFF or temporary employees at the FFT2 level may be printed at the local level without use of the IQCS.

Each agency will designate employees at the national, regional/state, and local levels as Fire Qualifications Administrators, who ensure all incident experience, incident training, and position Task Books for employees within the agency are accurately recorded in the IQCS. All records must be updated annually or modified as changes occur.

Red Card certification will have a 12-month currency.

Qualification System

All personnel filling ICS positions on the fireline must have completed a minimum of 32 hours of basic wildland fire training, including the modules on basic firefighting, basic fire behavior, and standards for survival.

NPS – It is NPS policy that two or more assignments be experienced after completing a Position Task Book, and receiving certification, before an individual begins movement to the next higher level. It is also NPS policy to require two or more qualified assignments be experienced in a position before an individual may become a position performance evaluator. Exceptions to this should be rare and well founded.

Annual Fireline Safety Refresher Training

Annual Fireline Safety Refresher Training is required for all personnel participating in fire suppression or prescribed fire activities who may be subject to assignments on the fireline. Any unescorted visitors must meet the requirements specified in Chapter 4 of this volume.

Annual Fireline Safety Refresher Training must include the following core topics:

- **Entrapments** – Use training and reference materials to study the risk management process (as identified in the *Incident Response Pocket Guide*) and rules of engagement (e.g., LCES, 10, 18, Look Up, Look Down, Look Around).
- **Current Issues** – Review and discuss identified “hot topics” and “national emphasis topics.” Review forecasts and assessments for the upcoming fire season and discuss implications for firefighter safety.
- **Fire Shelter** – Review and discuss last resort survival. Conduct “hands-on” fire shelter inspections. Practice shelter deployments in applicable crew/module configurations. No “live fire” exercises for the purpose of fire shelter deployment training will be conducted.
- **Other Hazards and Safety Issues** – Choose additional hazard and safety subjects, which could include SAFENET, current safety alerts, site/unit specific safety issues and hazards.

These core topics must be sufficiently covered to ensure that personnel are aware of safety concerns and procedures and can demonstrate proficiency in fire shelter deployment. The minimum refresher training hour requirements for each agency is identified below. Training time may be extended in order to effectively complete this curriculum or to meet local training requirements.

BLM – 4 hours
FWS – 8 hours
NPS – 8 hours
USFS – 8 hours

Annual Fireline Safety Refresher Training will have a 12-month currency.

A web site titled “Annual Wildland Fire Safety Refresher Training” is available to assist in this training. It can be reached through the National Interagency Fire Center’s homepage “Safety” link at www.nifc.gov.

USFS – The Incident Complexity Analysis **Appendix G** will be shared with all Type 3, 4, & 5 Incident Commanders. Review of this guide should be a part of your annual refresher training.

The Chief, Regional Foresters, Forest Supervisors, and District Rangers will personally communicate their expectation of leadership in fire management. This will be completed prior to fire season and in conjunction with National Leadership Team meetings and annual fire schools.

Each fireline qualified individual will receive training in the FS Code of Conduct.

Code of Conduct for Fire Suppression:

- Firefighter safety comes first on every fire every time.
- The 10 Standard Firefighting Orders are firm...we don't break them; we don't bend them.
- Every firefighter has the right to know that his or her assignments are safe.
- Every fireline supervisor, every fire manager, and every administrator has the responsibility to confirm that safe practices are known and observed.

Additionally, entrapment avoidance and deployment protocols have been revised and issued in the *Incident Response Pocket Guide* published in January (PMS No. 461/NFES No. 1077). The guide contains a specific "Risk Management Process" on page 1, and "Last Resort Survival" protocols on page 18. This guide will be issued to every firefighter during refresher fire training courses held each year.

Non-NWCG Agencies

Personnel from other agencies who do not subscribe to the NWCG qualification standards may be used on agency managed fires. However, agency fire managers must ensure these individuals are only assigned to duties commensurate with their abilities, agency qualifications, and equipment capabilities.

Qualification and Certification Committee

Each unit with fire management responsibilities will establish a Red Card qualification and certification committee. In areas cooperating with other federal, state, or local agencies, an interagency qualification and certification committee should include representatives from each unit. These qualification and certification committees provide management oversight and review of the wildland and prescribed fire positions under their jurisdiction. The committee also:

- Certifies that qualifications generated by IQCS or other agency systems for employees are valid by reviewing the training and experience of each employee.
- Determines if each employee possesses the personal characteristics necessary to perform the wildland and prescribed fire positions in a safe and efficient manner.
- Makes recommendations to the appropriate agency administrator or designee who is responsible for final certification signature.
- Develops interagency training needs and sponsors courses that can be offered locally.

- Ensures training nominees meet minimum requirements for attending courses.

Physical Fitness

Agency administrators are responsible for ensuring the overall physical fitness of firefighters. The agency administrator may authorize employees who are available and/or serving in wildland or prescribed fire positions that require a physical fitness rating of arduous, one hour each day for fitness condition. All other wildland firefighting personnel may be authorized up to three hours per week of duty time for fitness conditioning. Furthermore, individuals who have a position with an arduous physical requirement may be periodically tested during the fire season to ensure they are retaining the required level of fitness and conditions.

USFS – Forest Service direction is found in *FSH 5109.23-3*.

Physical Training and Conditioning

Fitness conditioning periods may be identified and structured to include aerobic and muscular exercises. Team sports are not authorized for fitness conditioning. Chapters 7, 8, and 9 of *Fitness and Work Capacity*, 2nd ed. (1997), provide excellent guidance concerning training specifically for the pack test, aerobic fitness programs, and muscular fitness training.

Medical Standards & Work Capacity Tests (WCTs)

The agencies have adopted the NWCG approved Work Capacity Tests (WCT) as the official method of assessing wildland firefighter fitness levels. See “*Work Capacity Tests for Wildland Firefighters, Test Administrator’s Guide*,” 9851-2810-MTDC for further reference.

WCTs are administered annually to all employees, including ADs and emergency hires, who will be serving in wildland or prescribed fire positions that require a fitness level. The currency for the WCT is 12 months.

Administration of the WCT and certification of non-agency firefighters is prohibited for liability reasons. Potential emergency firefighters who would be hired under AD Emergency Hire authority by the agency must be in AD pay status or sign an agency-specific volunteer services agreement when given the WCT.

Personnel taking the WCT will only complete the level of testing (Pack, Field, Walk) required by the highest fitness level identified for a position on their Red Card.

Agency administrators (or delegates) are responsible for ensuring that the Health Screen Questionnaire (HSQ) is administered prior to initiating a physical training program and/or the WCT, and that accurate documentation on a WCT Record is retained until the next testing. Test results must also be entered in the IQCS annually to update the fitness level and date that will appear on the Red Card. Physical fitness dates entered in IQCS will reflect the date the employee passed the fitness test.

NPS – The NPS will utilize the “PAR-Q & YOU” form as the health screening questionnaire prior to initiating a physical training program and/or the WCT.

This form is contained in the “Work Capacity Tests for Wildland Firefighters, Test Administrator’s Guide.” See www.peakcentre.ca/pdf/PAR%20Q.pdf for specific form required.

USFS – The Forest Service also uses the WCT as the official method of assessing wildland firefighter fitness levels. The specific direction, Implementation Guide, Health Screen Questionnaire and required processes can be found at the following web site: www.fs.fed.us/fire/fire_new/.

Note: Offices participating in the Southwest Area and Pacific Northwest pilot program for the Firefighter Medical Qualification Standards are required to ensure medical clearance prior to administering the WCT (HSQ is not required).

WCT Categories

The *NWCG Wildland and Prescribed Fire Qualification System Guide, 310-1* identifies WCTs for agency specific positions. There are three fitness levels – Arduous, Moderate, and Light – which require an individual to demonstrate their ability to perform the fitness requirements of the position. Duties in the “None” category are normally performed in a controlled environment, such as an incident base. For any position identified in the *310-1* with a fitness level of “None” or any technical specialist positions required to be on the fireline unescorted for non-suppression tasks, the required fitness level will be “Light.”

Work Capacity Test

| <i>Work Category</i> | <i>Test</i> | <i>Distance</i> | <i>Weight</i> | <i>Time</i> |
|----------------------|-------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|
| Arduous | Pack Test | 3 miles | 45 lb. | 45 min. |
| Moderate | Field Test | 2 miles | 25 lb. | 30 min. |
| Light | Walk Test | 1 mile | None | 16 min. |

Arduous – Duties involve field work requiring physical performance with above average endurance and superior conditioning. These duties may include an occasional demand for extraordinarily strenuous activities in emergencies under adverse environmental conditions and over extended periods of time. Requirements include running, walking, climbing, jumping, twisting, bending, and lifting more than 50 pounds; the pace of the work typically is set by the emergency conditions.

Moderate – Duties involve field work requiring complete control of all physical faculties and may include considerable walking over irregular ground, standing for long periods of time, lifting 25 to 50 pounds, climbing, bending, stooping, twisting, and reaching. Occasional demands may be required for moderately strenuous activities in emergencies over long periods of time. Individuals usually set their own work pace.

Light – Duties mainly involve office type work with occasional field activity characterized by light physical exertion requiring basic good health. Activities may include climbing stairs, standing, operating a vehicle, and long hours of work, as well as some bending, stooping, or light lifting. Individuals can usually govern the extent and pace of their physical activity.

Test Administration

A job hazard analysis (JHA) shall be developed and approved for each field office prior to administering the WCT. (See the sample JHA in **Appendix C**.)

- A HSQ will be administered prior to initiating a physical training program and/or the WCT with the following objectives:
 - ▶ To identify, prior to the WCT, at-risk personnel.
 - ▶ To identify existing injuries or illness and minimize the probability of new injuries
 - ▶ To establish the need for a medical examination (see Medical Examinations criteria below).

Administer the test using the JHA as a briefing guide. Document using the HSQ and WCT Record (**Appendices I & J**). These documents must be retained until the next testing.

NPS – For those parks that experience severe winter conditions and must test personnel during those conditions, work capacity testing may be conducted using industrial grade treadmills. This least-preferred option should only be considered when all other indoor facilities are unavailable (gyms, indoor tracks, malls etc.), and requires Regional Fire Management Officer approval. For safety reasons, these treadmills must have suitable handrails and kill-switches, preferably switches physically attached to the user via a cord. The Job Hazard Analysis must address all possible balance/fall mitigations. Specific questions are answered in the “*Work Capacity Tests for Wildland Firefighters*” 9851-2810-MTDC.

Health Screen Questionnaire (HSQ)/PAR-Q

The purpose is to identify individuals who may be at risk in preparing for and completing the WCT, which may result in a recommended exercise program and/or medical examination.

Title 5 CFR Part 339 – Medical Qualification Determinations, which provides a determination of an individual’s fitness-for-duty, authorizes solicitation of this information. The HSQ can be found in **Appendix I**.

Work Capacity Test (WCT) Record

Units will document the administration of the WCT to all employees and job applicants. This documentation must be retained until the next WCT is administered. Units may also be requested to provide data from these records to assist in the evaluation of the WCT process.

The information on the WCT Record is considered confidential and must be kept in the employee’s medical file. The identity of the individual must be protected.

Solicitation of this information is authorized by *Title 5 U.S. Code Section 3301*, which provides for a determination of an individual’s fitness-for-duty. A copy of the WCT Record is found in **Appendix J**.

Medical Examinations

Agency administrators and supervisors are responsible for the occupational health and safety of their employees performing wildland and prescribed fire activities, and may require employees to take a medical examination at any time.

Established medical qualification programs, as stated in 5 CFR 339, provide consistent medical standards in order to safeguard the health of employees whose work may subject them or others to significant health and safety risks due to occupational or environmental exposure or demand. The Federal Interagency Wildland Firefighter Medical Qualification Standards has been piloted in the Southwest Area (DOI agencies only) and will be in the Pacific Northwest in 2003. All other unaffected offices should follow the current standards as described below.

The following minimum requirements establish interim agency policy and associated guidance until Department or inter-Departmental policy is provided:

All employees who participate in wildland or prescribed fire activities requiring a fitness level (arduous, moderate, light) must answer all the questions on the HSQ/PAR-Q prior to taking their WCT.

- The information on any medical records is considered confidential and must be kept in the employee's OPF medical file.
- All permanent, career-seasonal, temporary, and student career experience program employees who participate in wildland or prescribed fire activities requiring a fitness level of arduous must have a pre-employment medical examination as a condition of employment.
- Stress EKGs are not required as part of the medical examination, and will only be approved if recommended and administered by the medical exam physician. If any "Yes" answer is indicated, a medical examination is required prior to the employee taking the WCT or if there is a known pre-existing medical condition that is already being monitored under medical care (e.g., high blood pressure), a medical clearance statement will be provided by the physician prior to taking WCT.

NPS – Per the PAR-Q, if any "Yes" answer is indicated, a medical consultation is required prior to the employee taking the WCT (Forms SF-78, Certificate of Medical Examination, and 1400-108, Physical Requirements for Firefighter and Smokejumper Positions). A doctor will then make a determination as to whether or not the employee should participate in a WCT.

"Wildland Firefighter" Defined: Those employees who perform duties of a hazardous and/or strenuous nature are targeted. Therefore, within this section, "wildland firefighter" hereinafter refers to an employee whose wildland fire position(s) qualifications require an "arduous" fitness level, as defined in the current PMS 310-1 *"Wildland and Prescribed Fire Qualifications System Guide."*

For health and fitness purposes, those who are fire-qualified at less than the arduous fitness level are not required to meet the mandatory fitness program requirements of DO-57 for wildland fire management. However, they are strongly encouraged to participate in the voluntary fitness program, and must

still meet physical fitness/work capacity requirements as outlined in 310-1 “*Wildland and Prescribed Fire Qualification System Guide*” for positions with moderate and light fitness requirements.

Health Screening: Arduous duty medical exams must be taken once every 3 years by wildland firefighters. They do not include stress EKGs, except for those 41 years or older if required by the examining physician. Those cases would be considered exceptional. FIREPRO funding will not be used to pay for stress EKGs, except in exceptional cases, which require prior approval by the regional fire management officer.

FIREPRO funding may be used to pay for medical exams for mandatory fitness program participants within the following limits:

- Those who meet the definition of “wildland firefighter” will have costs of all required medical examinations paid for by FIREPRO, not to exceed \$350. Anything in excess of \$350 requires approval of the regional fire management officer. This includes recent requirements for blood screenings.
- In the event an employee-selected physician indicates that an EKG or other advanced test is needed, the government may require a second opinion from an appointed physician.

Pending development and adoption of a Departmental medical surveillance program for wildland firefighters, the NPS will continue to use the U.S. Civil Service Commission Certificate of Medical Exam, SF-78, wildland fire medical examination standard, for use by examining physicians.

The examining physician will submit the completed SF-78 to the employee’s park, where it will be reviewed by the personnel office and the fire management officer. The SF-78 will be retained in the employee’s Official Personnel File.

The law enforcement medical exam for NPS rangers, who are collateral duty wildland firefighters, will suffice for wildland fire health screening purposes until such time as the new Departmental program is fully implemented.

Employees requiring medical exams on the 3-year cycle will have exams conducted prior to taking the arduous fitness WCT (Pack Test).