



**TO :**

**FROM :** National Wildfire Coordinating Group

**REPLY TO :** NWCG@nifc.gov

**DATE :** 05/19/2003

**SUBJECT :** SAFETY BULLETIN : Prescribed Fire Burnover

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The attached are the 24 and 72 hour reports from the Sawtooth Prescribed Fire Burnover investigation .

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# United States Department of the Interior

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Sawtooth RX Burn Burnover

## 24 Hour Report

On May 14, 2003, a Bureau of Indian Affairs firefighter from the Fort Apache Agency in Whiteriver, Arizona was seriously burned when he was trapped in a small flare up on the Sawtooth RX burn.

He was transported immediately by helicopter to the Indian Health Service Hospital in Whiteriver, and then transferred to the Maricopa Medical Center - Burn Unit in Phoenix, Arizona, where he is in critical condition with burns over 40% of his body.

An Interagency Accident Investigation Team has been formed by the BIA Fire Office in Boise, Idaho and is enroute to begin the investigation.

No other firefighters were injured when the flare up occurred.

The Accident Investigation report is due to the Regional Director within 45 days.

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Allen J. Anspach, Team Leader

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## **Sawtooth Prescribed Fire Deployment/Burnover Investigation**

### **72 Hour Brief**

On May 14, 2003, at approximately 2:45 pm, Bureau of Indian Affairs fire employee Richard G. Lupe was involved in a burnover and fire shelter deployment while working on the Sawtooth prescribed burn, about six miles west of Whiteriver, Arizona on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation.

Mr. Lupe walked, under his own power, from the burnover site to the staging area where he received aid from his co-workers until the helicopter assigned to the prescribed burn was able to transport him to the Indian Health Service Hospital in Whiteriver, Arizona. From the IHS hospital Mr. Lupe was flown to the Maricopa Medical Center – Burn Unit in Phoenix, Arizona, where he remains in critical condition. No other firefighters were injured.

The Sawtooth prescribed burn is a BIA, Fort Apache Agency burn designed to reduce fuel loads and provide openings for wildlife & livestock to meet the White Mountain Apache Tribe's recreation, wildlife and grazing objectives for the area. The Prescribed Burn Plan was approved by the BIA Western Regional Director in April of 2001.

The helitorch ignition of the burn took place on the morning of Monday, May 12, 2003. The fire burned according to the plan on that day, and continued to behave as expected thru May 13<sup>th</sup>, and most of May 14<sup>th</sup>. The approximate forty Bureau fire staff on site in support of this effort were monitoring the progress of the burn throughout, and were in a holding mode dispersed in various areas of the burn on the afternoon of Wednesday, May 14<sup>th</sup>, when the incident occurred.

At approximately, 2:30 pm on Wednesday, May 14, 2003, the lookout reported increased activity on the southeast portion of the burn. Apparently Mr. Lupe, who had been checking out various portions of the burn decided to drop into the drainage containing an active area of about thirty acres of unburned vegetation.

The site inspection indicates that extreme fire behavior occurred at the time Mr. Lupe dropped into the drainage. Approximately thirty acres burned at extremely high temperatures as indicated by the almost total consumption of fuel in what had been a heavily timbered, and brushy drainage.

The interagency investigative team that arrived on Friday, May 15, 2003, has visited the incident site, has gathered most applicable documentation, and is conducting interviews of witnesses as the investigation continues. Because of Mr. Lupe's medical condition, it has not been possible to interview him about the event.

At this time, the investigation team has not identified any critical "lessons learned" that can be passed on to the U.S. Wildland Fire Community.

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Allen J. Anspach, Team Leader

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Date