National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group

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NMAC Correspondence M2026-05 April 17, 2026

To: All Wildland Fire Management Personnel, Incident Management Teams (IMTs), Crew Supervisors, and Agency Administrators

From: National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (NMAC)

Subject: Fatigue Mitigation Guidance and Policy Direction for the 2026 Fire Season – Implementing ICAC Recommendations (NMAC Correspondence L2025-01)

Cumulative fatigue is a persistent, multi-factorial problem that directly threatens safety, decision-making, and responder health. Incident responders have increasingly reported that shift lengths that approach 16 hours over multiple days prohibit quality rest, as they must address nutritional and hygiene needs in addition to sleep within a short 8-hour window. In response to NMAC Tasking L2025-01, the Incident Commander Advisory Council (ICAC) has provided a comprehensive set of best practices, thresholds, and recommendations. NMAC fully endorses these findings and directs the piloting of the following changes for the 2026 fire year.

Core Principles (ICAC Generalized Perceptions)

1. **Fatigue is persistent and multi-factorial.** Inadequate sleep is the most immediate need to be addressed, but nutrition and physical fitness must also be elevated to optimize cognitive function, recovery, and safety.

2. **Health and wellness initiatives must be sustainable.** Short-term programs are insufficient; long-term, funded solutions should be a priority for implementation.

3. **Incident management requires a paradigm shift.** Agency administrators (AA) and IMTs will work together to identify and implement flexible, cost-effective rest and recovery strategies tailored to incident-specific conditions. The historic standard of a single large camp serving all responders is not the only, or the default, choice.

4. **Pay structure and compensation changes are essential to incentivize fatigue management.** Current pay structures can sometimes incentivize longer shifts over rest. IMTs must recognize the need to manage shift length and to include within the established duty day appropriate time to refurbish/resupply equipment for operational readiness consistent with the incident tempo. Within current policy, options to provide for personnel to rest and recover for operational readiness during the duty day are limited; however, best practices have been identified to optimize the available time after a shift to ensure quality rest is achieved. These support effective fatigue management and help to maintain equity and morale across federal and contract resources.

Best Practices for Immediate Implementation

Agency Administrators will ensure the Leader's Intent document provides latitude in IMT decision-making to address sleep quality as an element of responder safety. The following "best practices" will be available to IMTs without requiring higher-level approval to address this need:

- **Site- and incident-specific sleep arrangements.** Prioritize segregated sleeping areas for night/swing-shift resources (hotels, separate campground loops, sleeper trailers). When the incident is proximal to accommodations, consider ICP locations that will minimize drive time and allow for a minimum 2200–0500 sleep window (target 7–9 hours of quality rest).
- **Rotation into hotels mid-assignment.** When it is not feasible to provide lodging for all resources, rotate operational resources into available lodging for rest, hygiene, and morale boosts, especially after:
  - Night operations exceeding 4 shifts
  - Repeated firing/holding operations
  - Extended mop-up
  - Prolonged environmental disruption (smoke, heat, cold, wet conditions)
- **Manage shifts and shift length.** Set operational periods and briefing times to match required operational tempo and prioritize fatigue management rather than maximizing shift length and briefing at 0600 when 0700 is reasonable to allow an extra hour of morning rest. Target return to ICP by 1900–2000 instead of 2100 or later to allow for an evening meal and showers prior to sleep. Include swing shifts, when necessary, to maintain line presence
- **Nutrition improvements. Consider** supplemental food purchases to meet caloric demands.
- **Hub-and-Spokes Model exploration.** Consider town-based hubs and distributed spoke locations (sleeper trailers, seasonal housing, yurts) to logically manage quality rest locations for all responders.

Thresholds for Alternative Sleep Arrangements

Adjust sleep accommodations to address incident-specific conditions, including:

- Persistent smoke, heat/cold, or wet conditions
- Cumulative fatigue (time of season, resource condition)
- Camp location issues: proximity to highways, animals/livestock, generators, camp traffic, logistics infrastructure, and/or noise

- Driving time: 30–45 minutes one-way maximum; try to restrict driving before 0530 or after 2100
- Night/swing-shift resources will be prioritized for alternate sleep locations.
- Cost comparison: evaluate locality rates vs. traditional camp when contact specifications will allow. When lodging and/or M&IE are fiscally and operationally advantageous (including reduced drive risk and improved morale via market access), use them.

National Barriers

The following policy, financial, and cultural barriers will be addressed at the national level:

- **Compensation and duty structures:** Align practices to better support rest and recovery. Develop and implement policy/contract changes that allow personnel to refurbish, decontaminate without choosing between equipment maintenance and personal recovery.
- **Financial and logistical concerns:** Address perceptions of cost increases for lodging and/or M&IE by promoting use of the Hotel Cost Comparison/Use Decision Matrix and companion tools (see attachments) to document expected costs and incorporate factors including driving time, exposure, and impacts to operational readiness. Evaluate locality rate ceilings and caterer thresholds to trigger lodging and/or M&IE as preferred alternatives to camp and caterer models.
- **Cultural change:** Leadership must model and promote a culture that prioritizes quality rest over acceptance of fatigue as an expected "part of the job". Encourage development and implementation of ICP/camp models that are designed to optimize opportunities for safe, quality rest periods for all responders.
- **Equipment and infrastructure:** Consider revising sleeper trailer standards and piloting modern mobile sleep trailers with private ventilated compartments. Evaluate the feasibility of military-style climate-controlled yurts with white noise and consider whether upgrades to cache-issued sleeping pads and bags, cots, and tents are warranted.
- **Nutrition improvements:** Develop criteria to determine whether caloric demands require supplemental food purchases. Partner with the National Technology Development Program (NTDP) to ensure that meal specifications for catering contracts provide nutrient-dense, endurance-athlete-level meals (reduce high-fat, high-sugar, high-salt late-night options that delay sleep onset).
- **Accountability and security**: Expand personnel tracking protocols to ensure all resources are tracked to identified sleeping and work locations. Develop vehicle/equipment security protocols and expectations for after-hours behavior.

2026 Evaluation Year The 2026 fire season will serve as an evaluation year for these fatigue mitigation efforts. IMTs, Geographic Area Coordinating Groups, and agencies are expected to actively evaluate the success of these practices, including impacts on sleep quality, responder morale, incident safety, and operational effectiveness—and report findings at the year-end After Action Review (AAR). Data collection, lessons learned, and recommended adjustments will inform the approach in future seasons.

Best Practices Toolbox (Attached)

- Sleep Quality Checklist
- Incident Sleep Area Environment Risk Assessment
- Hotel Cost Comparison/Use Decision Matrix

These tools are provided as standard references for every incident.

Expected Outcomes

These changes help responders get proper rest, nutrition, and hygiene, while reducing fatigue and related risks. IMTs will include fatigue management in their deliberative incident risk analysis and document decisions made in conjunction with Agency Administrators to optimize use of available fatigue management options. As a result of this deliberative process, INBAs working for the AAs and the IMT Finance, Plans, Logistics, and Operations Sections and Command Staff will be empowered to implement these strategic decisions during the 2026 fire season.

Questions or requests for implementation support should be directed to your Geographic Area NMAC associate member.

/s/ Chuck Russell
Chair, National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group

Cc: Jason Loomis, ICAC