

CASUAL HIRE FAQs

HIRING FAQs

What is a casual?

A person hired locally and compensated under the DOI AD Pay Plan for Emergency Workers. A casual is also referred to as an emergency firefighter (EFF), AD and emergency worker. The term of hire for a casual is temporary in duration and will be terminated when other employment methods can be initiated. **A casual should never be hired when a regular government employee is available that meets the necessary qualifications. This includes name requests.**

What is the authority to hire casuals?

Casuals are hired under the provisions of the AD Pay Plan for Emergency Workers (43 U.S.C. 1469). Casuals hired under the AD Pay Plan must meet minimum physical fitness, security and qualifications requirements as established by the Department of Interior.

A copy of the most current AD Pay Plan can be found at: <https://www.nifc.gov/programs/casual-payment-center/ad-pay-plans>

What are the required situations for a casual to be hired?

- To fight an ongoing fire.
- During unusually dry periods or when fire danger is very high to extreme.
- To provide support to an ongoing incident.
- To place additional firefighters on standby for expected dispatch.
- To temporarily replace members of fire suppression crews or fire management personnel who are currently on fires.
- To attend training - normally should not exceed 80-hours per calendar year. The 80-hour limit does not include travel hours.
- To instruct emergency incident training when all other methods of hiring and contracting have been exhausted. Cannot exceed 120-hours per calendar year. The 120-hour limit does not include travel hours.
- To cope with floods, storms, or other all-hazard emergencies that threaten damage to federally protected property.
- Emergency fire stabilization work where prompt action is essential to avoid loss of life, property, or before potentially damaging climatic events occur.
- During a transition period, not to exceed 90-days, following a natural emergency, to develop plans and manage an emergency stabilization effort until regular employees can handle the situation or other employment methods can be initiated.
- To meet mission assignments issued by FEMA.
- To hire resources to provide public awareness for an emerging or projected incident, event, or situation.
- To provide support to prescribed fire projects (Mechanical and Chemical Reduction Projects excluded) (DOI only).

What positions can we hire a casual to perform?

The Incident Position Matrix found in the AD Pay Plan identifies the most commonly used positions in the Incident Command System. The matrix also notes established pay rates and, if applicable, qualification requirements as listed in the Wildfire Qualification System Guide (PMS 310-1).

If needed, an exception position may be established to meet a local need. A brief statement of duties must be reviewed and approved by the state incident business lead and attached to the OF- 288 when submitted for payment.

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What are the requirements to be hired as a casual?

- Casuals hired under the authority of the AD Pay Plan must have a social security number.
- Form I-9, Employment Eligibility Verification, be completed within three (3) business days of the date of hire.
- Annual Fireline Safety Refresher Training is required for all positions as identified in the Wildland Fire Qualifications Systems Guide (PMS 310-1).
- For positions listed in the Wildfire Qualification System Guide (PMS 310-1), the casual must also possess a current agency issued IQCS “Red” Card showing specific qualifications for the position in which they are hired.

What excludes someone from being hired as a casual?

- Not eligible for work in the United States
- Active-duty military personnel
- Inability to pass medical standards or agency-specific physical fitness requirements
- Does not possess qualifications needed for the position

What are the physical standards for working as a casual?

Depending on the position the casual is hired for, there may be minimum physical fitness standards and training requirements. Refer to the Wildfire Qualification System Guide (PMS 310-1) which can be found at <https://www.nwcg.gov/publications/pms310-1>.

DOI’s Wildland Fire Medical Standards Program helps to reduce workplace injuries by identifying emergency health trends and applying federal interagency medical standards across the department’s bureaus with wildland firefighting responsibilities. Current guidance can be found on the Medical Standards Program website at <https://www.nifc.gov/programs/medical-standards>.

Can a federal retiree be hired as a casual?

Yes, federal retirees may be hired under the AD Pay Plan. They must meet the same hiring, training, and physical requirements as any other casual. Please refer to IIBMH Chapter 10 page 10-3, line 36-38 and page 10-4, line 1-3.

Who holds responsibility for the hiring of casuals?

The hiring official designated by the hiring unit. Hiring officials need to have an in-depth knowledge of the AD Pay Plan and a full understanding of how and when the pay plan can be used. The Agency Administrator or designee has the final authority to accept or reject any person hired under the provisions of the AD Pay Plan.

Is there a requirement that a Single Resource Casual Hire Information Form (SRCHIF) is completed each time we hire a casual?

Yes. Hiring officials are required to complete the SRCHIF at the time of each hire of a single resource. The SRCHIF serves as a checklist for the steps and documentation required when hiring a casual. Keep in mind the individual may have multiple qualifications and be assigned to different positions each time they accept an assignment.

Who fills out the Single Resource Casual Hire Information Form?

The hiring official is responsible for completing the SRCHIF (PMS-934) at the time of hire and obtains the casual’s signature. A copy is provided to the casual and the original stays with the hiring unit.

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Do the requirements of HSPD-12 apply to casual hires?

Yes. Hiring units should coordinate with their Human Resources office for guidance on current requirements of HSPD-12 and how it applies to the hiring of casuals.

How do we locate/recruit casuals to hire?

- State employment offices
- Qualified local hires
- Agency organized crews
- Former employees and retirees who remain qualified

PAYMENT FAQs

What determines the rate of pay for a casual?

The pay rate is determined by the position in which the casual was hired to perform.

Can a casual change job positions while on an incident away from the home unit that results in a pay increase?

Pay increases may be appropriate if reassigning the casual to a different position (not an intermittent change).

What is an Employee Common Identifier (ECI) and when should it be used?

The ECI is a unique 10-digit number generated for each casual employee in the Federal Personnel Payroll System (FPPS) system. To address Personally Identifiable Information (PII) concerns, the use of the ECI replaces the collection of Social Security Number (SSN), where applicable. ECIs will be the only identification number used in e-ISuite and should be entered on the casual's OF-288 in lieu of the SSN. Once an ECI number is initiated for a casual his/her social security number, the number is permanent regardless of which agency they work for (including FS).

How is a casual's time documented?

The OF-288 is the "official" time reporting document. A casual's time may be documented on a CTR (SF-261) signed by the supervisor, then transferred to the OF-288.

The casual should always review and agree to the hours, position code and rate classification before signing the OF-288. The OF-288 needs to have the casuals ECI on it.

What if the casual's ECI is unknown?

The Approving Official can request an ECI number to be initiated for a new hire, or a list of ECIs paid from a hiring unit during the past three years can be requested from the Casual Payment Center.

How are casuals paid?

When a casual is released, the OF-288 is submitted to the hiring unit for review and processing by a designated Approving Official. Travel time home from the incident should be added to the OF-288. It is the responsibility of the Approving Official to audit the OF-288 for accuracy and completeness and certify the timesheet is legal for payment by meeting the provisions of the AD Pay Plan.

The designated Approving Official will email the OF-288(s) and all pertinent payment documents and any M&IE travel reimbursement on the OF-288 to the DOI CPC in Boise, Idaho, for processing (casualpay@blm.gov). If the DOI network is unavailable and PII is being processed, fax or overnight mail payment documents to DOI CPC.

The U.S. Treasury implemented the requirement for direct deposit and will discontinue the issuance of paper checks. If a casual cannot get a direct deposit bank account, there are two options:

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- Electronic debit cards can be opened to ascertain an electronic transfer of funds (e.g., Walmart Green Dot Debit Card), or
- EFT Waiver Request. The waiver request form can be found at nifc.gov/programs/casual-payment-center/hiring-documents. This waiver allows casual to receive a treasury check until a bank account can be established.

The Electronic Funds Transfer Waiver Request form must be completed by the casual; then submitted to the Payment Center for processing. The waiver process must be completed and submitted annually.

Wage and earning statements will be sent to the address on record at the CPC. Casuals should expect payment within *two to three* weeks after their release from the incident.

What pay benefits and deductions can a casual expect?

- Federal Taxes
 - Federal taxes will be deducted from their pay. Casuals must complete federal tax withholding forms (W-4) to avoid being taxed at the highest rate of single with dependents. Please encourage casuals to consult with a tax expert for guidance or questions on federal taxes.
- State Taxes
 - In states that require income taxes, withholdings will be assessed for the state in which the casual is hired, unless a reciprocal agreement is in place. The casual pay FPPS also allows for a voluntary state tax record to be added when a casual needs to pay state taxes for the state they reside in, as well as the “hired at” state. Please encourage casuals to consult with a tax expert for guidance or questions on state taxes. Casuals hired under the AD Pay Plan are covered under the Federal Employees’ Compensation Act (5 USC 81).
- Federal Employee Health Benefits (FEHB) and Federal Employee Dental and Insurance Programs (FEDVIP) employee premiums:
 - If a casual meets the requirement of working 130 hours each month for 90 consecutive days, the casual may elect to select an insurance health plan, dental, or vision plans.
 - The employee portion of the health insurance premiums will be deducted from future payments. If the casual does not work after acquiring FEHB, they can pay their portion of the premiums directly to the Interior Business Center (IBC).
 - Premiums for FEDVIP will be based on the policy selected on the BENEFEDS website. Currently direct billing to the employee will incur.

What pay benefits and deductions can a casual NOT expect?

- Premium pay differentials
 - Casuals are not entitled to hazard pay, overtime pay or any other supplemented pay differentials.
- Unemployment Benefits
 - Under the provisions of 5 U.S.C. 8501, federal agencies do not report wages earned to state offices for unemployment compensation purposes.
 - The services performed on a temporary, emergency basis are not eligible for unemployment benefits.
- Social Security
 - Social Security specifically excludes emergency services from Social Security and Medicare withholdings. Emergency service is defined in 218 (c) 6 of the Social Security Act as all services performed by an individual as an employee serving on a temporary basis in case of fire, storm, snow, earthquake, volcano, or other similar emergencies. Casuals are not entitled to earn or to be granted annual or sick leave.

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How does a casual get paid for a boot stipend?

When a casual works in an Arduous or Moderate position for a suppression, severity, Rx, or step-up incident/assignment, the CPC will award a \$167 boot stipend to the first qualifying assignment's payment to help offset the cost of boots each calendar year.

What if a casual becomes sick while on assignment?

If it is determined by the incident supervisor that a casual cannot perform work due to a non-work-related illness, they are guaranteed 8-hours for each day held by the incident. The Incident Management Team has the option to pay the guarantee or return them to their point of hire.

What if a casual is injured while on assignment?

If a casual sustains a traumatic injury in performance of duty, they may be entitled to Continuation of Pay (COP). COP is available for a maximum of 45 days or until they return from the incident.

- Pay is based on 8 hours per day, 7 days per week, for periods of medically documented disability.
- COP begins with the first day or shift of disability or medical treatment *after* the date of injury.
- COP ends when the casual leaves the incident, the original length of commitment ends, or when the casual is released back to duty, whichever occurs first.
- The rate of pay for COP is the AD hourly rate which the casual was working at the time of injury.

NOTE: Refer to the IBMH Chapter 10 for guidance on posting time to the OF-288. COP does not apply to occupational diseases or illness.

What hours are compensable for a casual?

Casuals working away from their point of hire are paid for all on-shift hours (travel, ordered standby, and actual work). Casuals are guaranteed a minimum of 8-hours per day, except for the first and last day of work.

Casuals working in support of an incident at their point of hire are not guaranteed 8-hours per day.

The "minimum" compensable time allowance for each work period is two hours per day but does not apply to the first or last day of multiple-day assignments. Exceptions should be documented in the remarks section of the OF-288 to avoid delay in payment. An example of an exception could be "the casual quit after the first hour of work when additional work was available."

If a casual is fired or quits without an acceptable reason before the emergency is over, pay will be stopped at that time.

How is the hiring period determined?

Per the Conditions of Hire stated in the AD Pay Plan, the hiring period begins at the point of hire and the time an individual is available for hire at the request of an agency representative. It ends at the time the casual is returned to the point of hire or is no longer available.

Point of hire is defined as the location of the unit where hiring documentation is completed, or other locations as determined by the hiring unit.

Hiring officials will ensure all hiring documentation is complete before directing the casual to an incident location.

Are casuals allowed "paid days off" at their home unit?

No. Casuals are not entitled to paid days off upon release from the incident or at their point of hire.

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Can we pay casuals to attend training?

Yes. The hiring unit can pay a casual to attend training (should not exceed 80-hours per year) if they deem the training is necessary and a benefit to the hiring unit. The 80-hour limit does **not** include travel hours. Training hours for all agencies are counted towards the 80-hour limit including FS training hours. Casuals who attend training to qualify for a position are paid one pay rate lower than the full performance pay rate. All required training and experience must meet the minimum requirements of the position as stated in the Wildland Fire Qualification System Guide (PMS 310-1).

Casuals who attend refresher training and are fully qualified for the position will be paid at the full performance pay rate.

What if the casual has a garnishment of wages?

Garnishment of wages (tax levies, child support and miscellaneous garnishments) is addressed in Title 42, USC, and Section 659. Forward any court-ordered garnishments to:

Interior Business Center Debt Management Branch, D-2640 PO Box 272030 Denver, CO 80227 Fax: 303-969-5392 Attn : Garnishments/Casual

Who should a casual contact if they have not been paid?

- Home Unit
 - The home unit can provide information on the date the timesheet was forwarded to the Casual Pay Center and check on the status of the payment for the casual.
- Casual Payment Center (CPC) (208-387-5760) or casualpay@blm.gov
 - When contacting the CPC regarding payment status, be prepared to provide the following information:
 - Casual's name,
 - Casual's SSN or ECI,
 - Employing agency (e.g., BLM, BIA, NPS, FWS),
 - The hiring unit batch number the payment was submitted under.

Who does a casual contact if they need employment verified?

Requests for employment verification are sent to the CPC.

DOI Casual Payment Center, MS270
3833 S Development Avenue, Boise, ID 83705
Phone: 208-387-5760
Fax: 208-433-6405
Email: casualpay@blm.gov

TRAVEL FAQs

When is the casual placed in travel status?

Travel begins when the casual starts travel or when they report to the point of hire or point of departure. Casuals are not compensated for time at home spent preparing for an assignment once notified by dispatch.

Travel interruptions exceeding three hours (per one way trip, to or from the destination) where individuals are free to sleep, eat or, to a limited degree, pursue personal activities, including waiting at an airport or other transportation site, are not compensable and must be shown on the CTR.

What about transportation for a casual?

All transportation required from the point of hire until return to the point of hire shall be at the government's expense (unless the casual chooses to deviate – see below).

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If a casual is fired or quits without an acceptable reason before the emergency is over, a government official will decide whether the government will provide return transportation and if the casual will be paid for travel time back to the point of hire.

What if the casual chooses to deviate from their official travel route?

A casual who has not been reassigned and chooses to deviate from their normal travel route home are considered no longer available and will not be compensated for travel time home or entitled to transportation provided by the government from the point where the deviation occurs.

If a Personally Owned Vehicle (POV) was authorized and the casual deviates travel home, they will only be reimbursed for the number of miles back to the point of hire. If POV is authorized and is more than 350 miles in either direction, a cost comparison sheet must be submitted with travel reimbursement.

What if the casual crosses time zones during travel?

When a time zone is crossed, time will be recorded in the original time zone until the casual is off shift for the day. The new time zone begins at the start of the next work shift. These same guidelines apply when returning to the point of hire. Time lost or gained will even out once the casual returns home.

How are travel expenses handled for casuals?

If the government cannot provide subsistence and lodging for a DOI sponsored casual, they will be reimbursed through the official Electronic Travel System (ETS). Casuals who travel will need to complete a Concur Travel User Profile form if being reimbursed through ETS.

The assigned FATA will use this form to create or update the casual's individual Concur profile. To be reimbursed, casuals must provide to the home unit the original receipts for lodging and any other allowable charges (excluding meals provided by the incident). A travel authorization and travel voucher will be created and processed at the hiring unit.

When subsistence is provided at the incident and lodging is not required casuals will only be reimbursed incidental expenses (\$5.00 per day) and any meals not provided by the incident (M&IE), up to 15 meals per incident. POV Mileage may also be reimbursed for use of private vehicles. These reimbursements may be paid on the OF-288 (excluding training and Rx for M&IE).

Commercial transportation provided by the government is not reimbursable to the casual.

What is the standard length of an assignment?

Hiring is of uncertain and purely temporary duration. Standard length of assignment is 14-days, exclusive of travel to and from the home unit. After the completion of a 14-day assignment and return to the home unit, the home unit should ensure days off between incidents has been taken for safety reasons. Casuals are not entitled to paid day(s) off upon release from the incident or at the point of hire.

Casuals can be extended for a second 14-day assignment if the conditions outlined in the IIBMH, and the Red Book are met.

What is the length of a workday while on assignment?

A typical workday is 12–16 hours. Each employee is required one hour of rest/sleep for every two hours of work/travel. A maximum of a 16-hour day will be followed with a minimum of 8 hours in non-pay (rest) status.

Work shifts exceeding 16 hours and/or consecutive days that do not meet 2:1 work/rest ratio should be the exception, and no work shift should exceed 24hours. All work shifts exceeding 16 hours, and every

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instance where work/rest cycles will be exceeded, requires a justification, and will be documented by the appropriate Agency Administrator or Incident Commander. This information will remain with the incident agency.

What are the requirements for positions requiring certifications and licenses?

Casuals in positions that require special certification or licenses (e.g., emergency medical technicians, drivers, instructors) must meet the requirements of the hiring agency and of the state where the incident is located.

What if a casual is injured or too ill to work?

Casuals are covered under the FECA, administered by the OWCP for work related injuries and illnesses. To report a work-related injury or illness:

- The casual completes the employee section of the appropriate form, (CA-1 for Traumatic Injuries; CA-2 for Occupational Illness), reports the injury to the on-site supervisor, and obtains a witness statement.
- The on-site supervisor completes the supervisor's section of the CA-1 or CA-2 within 48 hours of the injury/illness. If medical care is necessary, requests authorization and obtains medical treatment for the injured/ill worker.
- The Finance Section or the local agency office ensures the required paperwork is complete, processed and submitted to the casual's home unit within 48 hours.
- The home unit will process the completed CA-1 or CA-2 within agency guidelines and timeframes. If it is medically determined the casual cannot perform their duties, they may be released to their point of hire. Travel is paid for the return to the point of hire.

How are casuals moved from one incident to another?

The casual's supervisor will have them processed through the Demob Unit and sent to the new incident with their OF-288 closed out from the original incident. Casuals are not to initiate travel methods independently; Ground Support will provide further transportation instructions.

What conduct is unacceptable when on assignment?

Casuals are required to sign an Incident Behavior Form (PMS 935-1) at the time of hire outlining common responsibilities regarding inappropriate behavior and/or drug and alcohol use. The Incident Behavior Form states disciplinary action will be taken in the event of:

- Possession or use of alcoholic beverages or non-prescription drugs during the period of employment.
- Sexual, racial, and gender harassment on the incident (this could lead to personal liability, both criminal and civil, if a victim chooses to file suit).
- Employee absences and unfitness for duty.

Violation of incident conduct rules can result in immediate removal from the incident, immediate termination and the circumstances reported to the home or hiring unit.

What happens if a casual quits at an incident or does not perform the duties?

Poor performance or quitting an incident can result in immediate removal or termination from the incident and the circumstance reported to the hiring unit. The casual's time and pay stops at the time of removal or termination. The Agency Administrator will determine whether return transportation will be allowed at government expense. If transportation is not covered at the government's expense, a commissary deduction will be posted on the OF-288 and processed by the CPC during the pay process.