

Safety Alert of THE MONTH

PLEASE PASS THIS ON TO PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS IN BC'S FOREST INDUSTRY

June 2019

Working on Wildfires

With the peak of the wildfire season just ahead of us, it is a good time to review safety considerations of working on wildfires. It has been a very dry spring, so the potential for another significant wildfire season is high.

This Safety Alert applies whether you are working as part of a fire crew, a faller, a heavy equipment operator or any other specialized position on a fire.

The two critical safety practices discussed in this Safety Alert are LACES and briefings.

LACES

Everyone working in wildfire should understand this acronym and follow it to create a safer worksite on a wildfire. LACES are the basic safe work procedures that should be practiced on every fire.

L*ookouts*: One person should be designated to monitor for changes in conditions and should be in a position to communicate these changes to everyone in the group. The monitored changes could include wind shifts or increases in fire activity. The lookout may continue to work with the group, or, depending on the situation, be placed in terrain that allows for a better view of the conditions.

A*ncor Points*: When constructing fireline, always start from a position where the fire is not likely to outflank workers. This can include roadways; rivers; previously build guards; retardant lines; or other fire resistant areas. This area will prevent the spread of fire from flanking workers and cutting off escape routes and safety zones.

C*ommunications*: Ensure adequate and effective communications. This can include radio communication, briefings (see below), hand signals, No Work Zone (NWZ) and danger tree flagging protocols and others, as long as they are tested and can be relied upon to transfer timely, accurate information.

E*scape Routes*: Maintain two escape routes to safety. Test these routes to see how long they take and if they are safe and easy to follow. If necessary, create a new one. Examples of escape routes may be: back along a safety trail; out a road; or even, into "the black," if the area has been cleanly burned and there is very little fuel left behind.

S*afety Zones*: Ensure that any safety zones are large enough to protect the group from the expected fire behavior. The old rule of thumb used to be that the safety zone should be four times the maximum flame length, but this has been shown to not always be effective. Effective safety zones are also difficult in tall timber and steep terrain. Instead, considerations should be made for alternative tactics so resources do not have to work in these areas, including sprinkler systems, backfiring operations, or refocusing on other areas.

All of these components are used together to create a safer worksite. If more than one of these considerations cannot be supported for some reason, work with your supervisor on the fireline to decide whether you should be in the area or not. Remember, when in doubt, back out!



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Briefings

A thorough and effective briefing is one of the parts of the Communications consideration in L.A.C.E.S. A briefing is a daily safety prework meeting that happens before fighting fire.

Everyone on the fire has the right and responsibility to get a briefing. Workers should not start work until they receive one and are clear on objectives, safety considerations, and chain of command in your area. If you don't know, ask.

An effective briefing should cover the following topics:

- Site hazards – any hazards unique to the worksite
- Chain of command – who you are reporting to, and how they can be contacted
- Communications – what radio channels are being used on the fire, and how these channels are used. This should include any known areas with poor radio signal.
- Objectives and tactics – both general and specific. This would cover the daily assignment for the crew or resource. For example: details on what type of guard to build, in what location and the planned results for the work.
- First aid considerations – description of where first aid is located, who is assigned to provide first aid, how first aid is called, and how any evacuation of injured personnel will occur.
- Weather and expected fire behavior – Understand how this can affect your section of the fire

Stay safe on fires this year and look out for each other.

Additional Resources

- BC Wildfire Service Public Website – www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status – For the latest information on fire danger rating and fires of note, as well as other related information
- Wildfire Lessons Learned Centre - www.wildfirelessons.blog - A site that provides access to a variety of tools and resources for safety on wildfires
- WFSTAR – www.nwccg.gov/publications/training-courses/rt-130 - A series of wildfire videos on a variety of topics. Used as annual refresher training for United States firefighters.

