



# SAFETY ALERT

## OF THE MONTH

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## Heavy Equipment Operation on Wildfires

AOM: 2021-04-19

Cody had lots of experience running a D7 Cat for a local logging contractor. He refreshed his S-100 training every year and had some experience building guard on small fires. Now he was on a major fire, part of a team of three dozers building fireguard. Cody wondered “Why is the guard not located right against the fire?” The fire was getting closer to town and he wanted to directly attack the fire. At the morning briefing, the fireline supervisor explained a back burn was planned and they needed to leave fuel between their guard and the wildfire. A single pass cat guard wouldn’t contain this fire so a backburn was needed to create a much wider guard. “Makes sense” thought Cody, “I’m glad I know the big picture.”

The wildfire season is quickly approaching and now is a great time to review how operating heavy equipment on the fireline can improve safety and the success of fire suppression efforts.

### Best Practices

1. **Start with a daily briefing.** A safety and planning meeting will help the crew learn the tasks, goals and safety concerns for the day. Actively think about how conditions can change during the day, anticipate what might go wrong and ask questions so the team knows what to do during those situations.
2. **Teamwork.** It is likely you’ll be working in a team with other heavy equipment operators and a supervisor. Operators should verify who their fireline supervisor is and ensure they have clear directions and adequate communications. The supervisor is the main source of information and instructions for the operators and they rely on operators to give them feedback on their progress or hazards.
3. **Stick to the plan.** It can be difficult to see the “big picture” plan for controlling a wildfire so it is important to follow the instructions you receive. Do not change the plan or act on your own. This is very dangerous and will disrupt the rest of the operation. If something is wrong or hazardous, radio your supervisor to figure out the best way to handle the situation.
4. **Communication.** Situations can change rapidly on the fireline. You need to be on the right radio channel to hear any changes in conditions or plans. If you need to switch channels, let others know so they won’t assume you’ve heard their messages.





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5. **Location, location, location.** Make sure you know the locations of all the equipment and people on your team. Don't change plans without approval. Being out on your own in an unknown location creates a very dangerous situation if the fire's intensity increases. Make sure to look out for workers on the ground. They could be out front of your equipment locating the fireguard or behind you setting up hoses or equipment.
6. **Check-in.** A check in system is a way to make sure you are safe and a way for you to communicate with your fireline supervisor about changes in fire behaviour, weather, or status of work. Conditions on the fireline can change quickly and check-ins help to ensure that everyone on the fireline is safe and help can be rendered if needed. It is also critical to check in when you make it back home after your shift. This is important when fighting fires as it is very tiring work with long hours.



## Additional Resources

- Wildfire Hazards: Phase Congestion Alert – [www.bcforestsafe.org/safety-alert/may-2020-monthly-safety-alert/](http://www.bcforestsafe.org/safety-alert/may-2020-monthly-safety-alert/)
- Working on Wildfires Alert - [www.bcforestsafe.org/safety-alert/june-2019-monthly-safety-alert-working-on-wildfires/](http://www.bcforestsafe.org/safety-alert/june-2019-monthly-safety-alert-working-on-wildfires/)

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Disclaimer: We encourage the sharing of information that can help improve safety for all workers.



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