



Safety Stand Down (2008-1)



Multiple Early Season Firefighter Burn Injuries in California

All CAL FIRE firefighters shall review this Safety Stand Down as soon as possible and document said review on an IIPP-6 form.

The CAL FIRE Safety Office has become aware of at least 10 firefighter burn injuries occurring on four wildfires in California during the three day period of June 10th through June 12th, 2008. These burn injuries occurred on a local jurisdiction fire in Sacramento County, state jurisdiction fires in Placer and Butte Counties, and a federal jurisdiction fire in the Los Padres National Forest. Four of these firefighters incurred burn injuries involving the face and/or hands that have initially been reported to be serious. Investigations are underway to determine the facts and to identify causal factors.

In the meantime it is important to remember that California has had two consecutive years of below normal rainfall. The spring of 2008 in California was the driest on record dating back to 1894. Rain events in late May temporarily improved live and dead fuel moistures however they remain below the 20 year average in many places and are declining rapidly. The 2008 fire season seems to be picking up where fire season 2007 left off. Large timber fires in Santa Cruz County in May, significant numbers of structures destroyed and multiple firefighter burn injuries so early in the fire season all give cause to take a moment and reflect on what lies ahead.

Wildland fires can be extremely destructive and firefighting is inherently dangerous. We must fight them aggressively but the first priority for every fireground decision is personnel safety. This philosophy holds true for all incident personnel, from the management team that produces the incident safety plan to the company officers, crew leaders and firefighters that execute it. Wildland firefighting conditions continuously change especially during wind events. Factor the current and expected weather, topography and fuel conditions into every tactical decision that you make. **Light and flashy fuels have proven to be especially dangerous when the wind shifts.**

Situational awareness and assessing the “big picture” should always be at the forefront of the firefighters’ mind. You are empowered to make risk decisions based on current and expected conditions and your evaluation of the probability of success. Imagine the worst safety circumstances that could reasonably arise and **make sure LCES mitigations are in place each and every time.** Make sure that PPE is issued, in good condition, and is being used. Do this for yourself, do it for your family and friends, do it for the people that work under your direction, and do it as often as is necessary.