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WASHINGTON - Secretary Gale A. Norton issued an open letter to the residents of the White Mountains of Arizona today expressing her condolences to the friends and family members of those killed while battling wildfires in the region. Secretary Norton emphasized that the recent tragedies have underscored her determination to ensure that public firefighter safety be an issue of top priority within the Department.

"The recent loss of life and injuries to firefighters here, in Idaho, and in Washington State, underscore my resolve to ensure public firefighter safety remains our number one priority," Secretary Norton said. "The legacy of safe healthy forests is one of the greatest things we can do in memory of those who have perished, those who have suffered, and finally those who have survived the recent tragic events."