



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

Washington, DC 20240

Memorandum

To: Regional Directors
Agency Superintendents
Attention: Regional Fire Management Officers
Agency or Zone Fire Management Officers

Through Deputy Bureau Director, Field Operations

From: Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs

Subject: Fire Response Safety and Mental Health Awareness

As we move to the peak of our fire year, predictive services personnel are reporting extreme conditions for the remainder of the peak season with high levels of strain on our national interagency coordination system with very high resource commitment. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) has already experienced large and devastating fires in New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada and Washington impacting tribal lands and tribal way of life. This memorandum serves as a notice to agency administrators, fire managers and line officers to ensure your personnel are taken care of physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Firefighters and support personnel work long and difficult hours under stressful conditions throughout the fire season. Risk of incidents within an incident (IWI) are increased by driving long hours on the road to wildfires in remote locations, taking night shifts, continuous work in dangerous environments, and witnessing the impact fires bring to our communities. These working conditions impact mental health by contributing to high levels of stress and fatigue, which may contribute to hazardous situations affecting the safety of our personnel and the public.

Make force protection your priority:

- Prevent exhaustion: Ensure work to rest guidelines are followed (3 days of rest between every 14 days of fire assignment) and consider granting additional days of administrative or personal leave if fire personnel need it.
- Take steps to prevent accidents and illness: Remind firefighters to stay hydrated, keep feet dry, and wear proper personal protective equipment (PPE) correctly. Also, encourage personnel maintain high levels of situational awareness on their state of condition, the state of condition of their peers, and making sound decisions.
- Mental and emotional health is a priority on the line: If able, encourage firefighters to call and check in with loved ones, and ask for help when needed.
- Encourage healthy, safe behavior to ensure strong physical and mental capability.

Firefighters, support personnel, and public safety are always the highest priority. With each new fire start, it is the responsibility of fire managers to assess risk to identify safe and appropriate management actions. Thank you for your work to protect communities and tribal lands during this challenging fire season.

Contact a BIA Mental Health Team member for critical incident support, requests for mental health education or assistance with care coordination.

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CC: Directorate, Environment and Natural Resources