



The Official Publication of the Forest Fire Wardens
protecting Penn's Woods from wildfires.

The Forest Fire Warden News

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources Bureau of Forestry

Opportunities Through Challenge

When people are asked about what they want from work or volunteer activities, many indicate that they want to “do something that matters” or “make a difference”. Few people want to invest their heart and soul into something that doesn’t provide some level of satisfaction towards a worthwhile cause. When the Forest Fire Warden organization in Pennsylvania was formed, wildfire was a real and significant problem here and across the nation. This was key to convincing the public that protection of forests was a worthwhile effort.

In the intervening decades, wildfires seemed to become mundane. Something that needed to be taken care of, but a relatively simple matter. We were probably guilty of feeling that we had all the answers, that management of fire in the wildlands was simply a matter of doing some prevention programs and putting out fires as quickly and efficiently as possible. The lessons of the past few years have since shown us that wildland fire is a much more complex issue, requiring innovative and modern thinking based on realities of the current situation. As populations have grown, development has expanded, and our tendency to over-simplify the role that fire played in the natural world has put the country in a difficult situation without easy answers.

One thing that this additional attention to wildland fire has done is forced some movement on national efforts forward that probably would have otherwise languished. When the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) passed in late 2021, there was a historic amount of funding appropriated for wildland fire. Some of this funding has been provided to state forestry agencies, including Pennsylvania. This has increased our capacity to do things like conduct training, replace outdated equipment, and distribute grants to volunteers. We have increased the number of Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) grants and raised the maximum amount that can be awarded. In the future, we hope to be able to implement another program called Community Wildfire Defense Grants (CWDG). This program provides funding to local governments and communities to develop and implement wildfire protection planning. The CWDG program has also provided funding that will allow us to do more education and outreach involving wildfire mitigation and prevention.

Most Forest Fire Wardens who volunteered or entered this line of work did so because they felt that this was a worthwhile effort. Current events show us that wildland fire is a significant issue both locally and nationally, and I only foresee this importance increasing in the future. There are many challenges before us but also more opportunities to work together to make a difference.

Thank you for your service in doing something that matters, I wish you all a safe and successful fall fire season.

Michael D. Kern, Chief Forest Fire Warden

Division of Forest Fire Protection Personnel

Diane Schmidt
Administrative Officer

Charlie Choplick
***Logistics and Finance
Section Chief***

Rick Temple
Fire Cache Manager

Terry Smith
Special Investigator

Brian Pfister
*Wildfire Prevention
Specialist*

Jesse Geiman
***Communication
Section Chief***

Nick Sholly
*Radio Telecommunications
Specialist*

Vacant
*Radio Telecommunications
Specialist*

Matt Reed
***Operations and Planning
Section Chief***

Mike Becker
*Qualifications and Training
Specialist*

Todd Breiningner
*Prescribed Fire
Specialist*

Chad Northcraft
*Incident Management
Specialist*

Katie Dildine
*Fire Operations
Technician-East*

Jason Williams
*Aircraft Operations and
Safety Specialist*

North Central Regional Support Crew Training

A few years ago, pre-COVID, the Cedar Mountain Wildfire Crew had a few folks needing an S-130 Field Exercise. After a bit of discussion, we decided to make it a crew training as well. The idea was for folks to complete their S-130 training and build on crew cohesion. After the exercise crew members toured the Goodall Fire Tower Cabin, built a campfire, and had a cookout. It was a picture-perfect day.



Last year during a Cedar Mountain Crew meeting they asked about doing a similar exercise with COVID restrictions easing. Originally, we hoped to hold an exercise in mid to late spring. Well, time kind of slipped away and spring was coming to an end quickly. Once again there was a need for an S-130 Field Exercise. This time mostly for a handful of Volunteer Firefighters. Logistically it made sense to combine events once again. That's when "ideas" began to fly.



The first idea was a voluntary camping trip for Cedar Mountain in conjunction with the exercise. Several crewmembers liked the idea, so we began to run with it.

A couple of weeks before the event I had the idea to invite the Endless Mountains Wildfire Crew and Tiadaghton Forest Fire Fighters Association. Even though there wasn't much notice Jim Mechling (Endless Mountains) thought it was a good idea. We held the exercise with positive feedback.



Fast forward to this year. I reached out to all three crews in late spring to develop a planning committee for what I have dubbed as the North Central Support Crew Training. The committee selected September 10th to hold the training this year. Members from all three crews participated. They completed Stop the Bleed training and worked through two scenarios (Initial Attack / Chainsaw Accident). Both scenarios were designed to focus on processes and actions while facilitators injected several challenges.



During the AAR, folks overwhelmingly stated they liked the concept of the multi-crew training and would like to continue as an annual event.

**Brian Plume, Forest Fire Specialist Supervisor,
Tioga Forest District**

DCNR Engine Program

Years ago, the Division of Forest Fire Protection looked at the engines we had in the state and tried to see how we could improve our program. An equipment committee was created out of this brainstorming session. The tasking of this committee was twofold: one was to standardize the fire equipment that we have across the state and the other was to develop specifications for Type 6 engines that we can send out-of-state to help our state and federal partners.



E-603 - 2022 Six Rivers Lightning Complex, Willow Creek, CA

The first two Type 6 engines arrived in 2012, with two additional units arriving in 2016. After a short hiatus, two more are currently on order and should be arriving by the end of the year. This will bring our fleet of 600 series engines to six. Beginning in 2013, we started sending engines out-of-state helping our partners, while letting our people gain valuable experience. So far, we have sent 36 crews with the engines out-of-state. The biggest year for us was 2021 when we sent seven crews out on engines. It has been working well to have one crew drive an engine out and rotate crews every two weeks.



5000 series flat-bed engines

Another project of the equipment committee is the flatbed units that are less expensive than the 600 series engines and hold 500 gallons as compared to the 300 gallons that the 600 series hold. They don't have all the

storage space for gear like the 600 series have. These units are considered Type 5 since they meet the requirements with the additional water. We are calling these flatbed units the 5000 series. We have been purchasing these units every couple years since 2015 and currently have eleven in the fleet. We are currently working on the specifications for two more of these flatbed units. It is a goal of mine to eventually have at least one 5000 or 600 series in each district.



New 150-gallon Slip-on unit

The last project that I will mention with the equipment committee is the slip-on units that the Division of Forest Fire Protection has been purchasing for the districts lately. To standardize we have been writing the specifications and purchasing the units, so they are basically the same in each district. We have been trying to work out the fine details and address any problems over the years. 44 slip-on units that hold 150 gallons have been purchased since 2015. 11 of these units just arrived at the Fire Cache last week.

In short, the engine program is really moving along. A big thanks goes out to the equipment committee that has put a lot of effort into the program over the last few years.

Todd Breininger, Prescribed Fire Specialist, DFFP



2022 Wildland Fire Crew Season

We had a fairly shaky start to the Pennsylvania Wildland Fire Crew season, but finally received our first request for a crew on Saturday July 30. PA-PAS Keystone was the first to drive out on July 31st where they started on the 2022 NRG Fire Support in Montana upon arrival. Keystone was then assigned to the Elmo fire also in Montana. The Keystone Crew returned to Harrisburg, PA August 18th and overnighted there, returning to their homes on the morning of August 19th.

At the same time, we had two engines, E-603 and E-602, on assignment in Texas.

On Thursday, August 4 we received a request for the PA-PAS Liberty Crew. They headed out on August 5th to their assignment: the Moose Fire in Idaho. They returned to Pennsylvania August 24th, overnighting in Harrisburg to return to their homes on the morning of August 25th.



We also received an update from the crew of E-602 on the day of the Liberty Crew request: "they are assigned to the Smoke Rider fire today, estimated at 1000 acres. Fire is north of San Antonio, west of Austin. Expecting to be there a few more days, then maybe sent back south. Very hot, 100 plus degrees."

August 15th, we received our third crew request, and gathered the members for PA-PAS-Independence, they flew out of Harrisburg on August 17th. The Independence Crew was assigned to the Cornish Gulch Fire near Philipsburg Montana. They returned to Pennsylvania September 4th.

Four days later we received another request, it was PA-PAS Anthracite's turn to head west. They flew out of Harrisburg on August 23rd. The Anthracite crew seen several assignments while on deployment: Bear Gulch, Outlaw, Picnic, Spruce Mountain and Tonto Creek, all in Idaho. Anthracite returned to Pennsylvania on September 8th and overnighted in Harrisburg to return to their homes on September 9th.

The last request received was on September 6th, the Avery Forest District in Idaho requested a suppression

module in their place, and thankfully we had enough people to help with that. The Nittany Suppression Module headed to Avery, ID on September 7th to replace the Anthracite Crew. For those who are unfamiliar with the term, a suppression module is simply a smaller crew, whose positions are generally negotiable between the sending and receiving units. This module had 10 personnel and was made up of pretty much all our remaining available crew resources at the time. The Nittany Suppression Module returned to Pennsylvania on Sunday September 25th.



Engines 602 and 603 returned to PA from Texas in mid-August, and E-603 was dispatched again, this time to the SRF Lightning Complex in the Six Rivers NF of California. That engine remained in California until the end of the incident and returned in late September.

Even with a relatively quiet fire season, we had plenty of resources out on assignments in different parts of the country. We had four crew and one module assignments, four engine assignments and, as of October 3rd, 61 single resources dispatched and returned, and 3 more currently on assignment.

Katie Dildine, Wildland Fire Operations Technician, DFFP

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PA Wildland Fire Academy

The 2022 PA Wildland Fire Academy was held May 31 – June 5 at Shippensburg University. Since transitioning from “Crew Camp” to an academy, Lock Haven University had been used twice. After a year of growing pains and another year of working out kinks, it seemed we were on track to have everything dialed-in for a great year in 2020. Then, of course, the pandemic hit, and everything was cancelled for two years. When we attempted to set things up for a return this year, logistical issues at the university prevented a commitment for our event, so the academy was moved to Shippensburg. While everyone involved with planning the training was wary about the change of venue, it turned out to be a great experience.

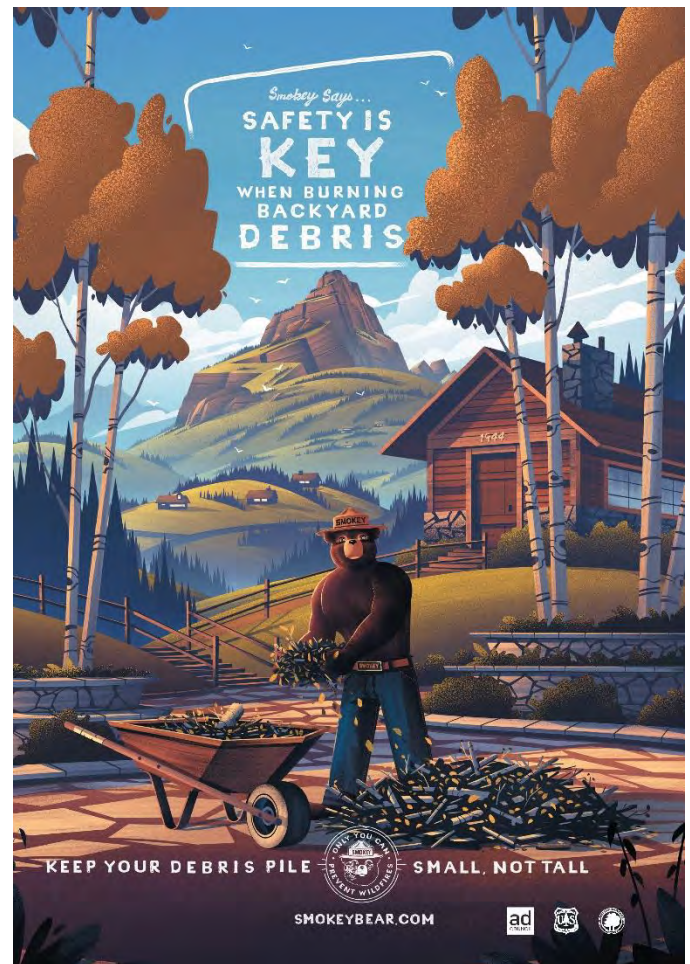
The academy hosted twelve courses this year and issued 268 certificates. Counting both students and staff, there were a total of 297 individuals in attendance. Shippensburg proved to be an ideal location, with field sites relatively close and a small campus perfect for our use.



An addition to the academy this year was a quickly planned, but well-attended Cornhole Tournament on Wednesday evening to benefit the Wildland Firefighter Foundation. Sixteen teams competed for prizes donated by Kestrel Weather Meters, and refreshments were provided by the Allegheny Hardwood Utilization Group, Keystone Wood Products Association, and the Northern Tier Hardwood Association. In all, over \$1,150 was raised and donated in the name of Dan LeCrone, Forest Fire Specialist Supervisor from Rothrock State Forest, who sadly passed away last fall.

While nothing is yet set in stone, we intend to return to Shippensburg in 2023, and the tournament will be back with improvements! Watch for the announcement this spring.

**Matt Reed, Operations and Planning Section
Chief, DFFP**



Something as Simple as a Quality Size-Up

As I was thinking about what to write about this year several things came to mind. Working with Avenza Maps, working in Field Maps, the different applications that we use on the fire line, or maybe just doing an equipment review, but ultimately what I have decided to focus on is the importance of a proper size up.

After several years of dispatching resources for fire, search, and natural disasters I have come to appreciate how important a good size up is. It's one of the simplest things we can do at the start to lay a good foundation for the rest of the incident. Despite it being simple, as emergency responders, we do not always take the time we need to do a proper size up and relay the information back to dispatch. In the end the time we saved by not doing one at the start of an incident is lost later when we are trying to bring people up to speed as to what is happening.

I have seen many forms out there to try and assist people with what all is needed in a size up, and for us as wildland firefighters, the quickest reference for us is the inside front cover of the IRPG.

SIZE-UP REPORT

- Incident Name
- Incident Commander
- Incident Type
 - Wildland fire, vehicle accident, HazMat, search and rescue, etc.
- Incident Status
- Location
- Jurisdiction
- Radio Frequencies
- Incident Size
- Fuel Type
- Wind Speed and Direction
- Slope and Aspect
- Best Access
- Special Hazards or Concerns
- Additional Resource Needs

The size-up report has everything that an incident commander would need to relay to dispatch. This in turn allows dispatch to relay the information to any other sources that may need it.

Looking at each item individually we can see how it impacts incoming resources or what information that it relays.

Incident Name: As simple as this is, it is surprising how many incidents end up with multiple names. Naming the incident from the start

makes sure there is not any confusion in the future. It's a good idea to name the incident after a local geographical feature. Most name the incidents after a road but if you have several fires along the same road consider the nearest drainage or stream to help avoid confusion.

Incident Commander: People need to know who is in charge. This keeps everyone informed as to who is making the decisions and has the ultimate responsibility. If command is transferred this also needs to be relayed to keep everyone on the incident aware of who they work for. The chaos of a developing incident is enough, and if people are unsure who is in charge it makes it all the worse.

Incident Type: We relay this because sometimes the type of dispatched incident is not always what it actually is. Many times, resources have been called to a "wildfire" to arrive on-scene and it is a structure fire or a car fire. It's good to confirm with dispatch that what type of incident they dispatched is what the incident actually is.

Incident Status / Incident Size / Additional Resource Needs: What stage is the incident in? Is it a developing fire or is it already in mop up? Is the incident commander on scene within their comfort level or does another IC need to be ordered? Can we cancel or slow the rate of incoming resources? A good description of the incident status, size, and needs of any additional resources will answer all those questions.

Location / Jurisdiction / Best Access: This is just where the fire is at and whose land it is. Location is best given as a Lat / Lon (DMS) if possible, with an address or other recognizable feature (road intersection) as a secondary description. Jurisdiction is important because different agencies have different ways of doing business. Here in Pennsylvania, it is not normally an issue, but in areas with lots of federal ground, this may become an issue. Best access is something that needs to be given at the start and updated as the incident progresses. What was the best access at the start of an incident may very well be the worst a few hours later due to a wind shift, or something as simple as a vehicle breaking down in the area.

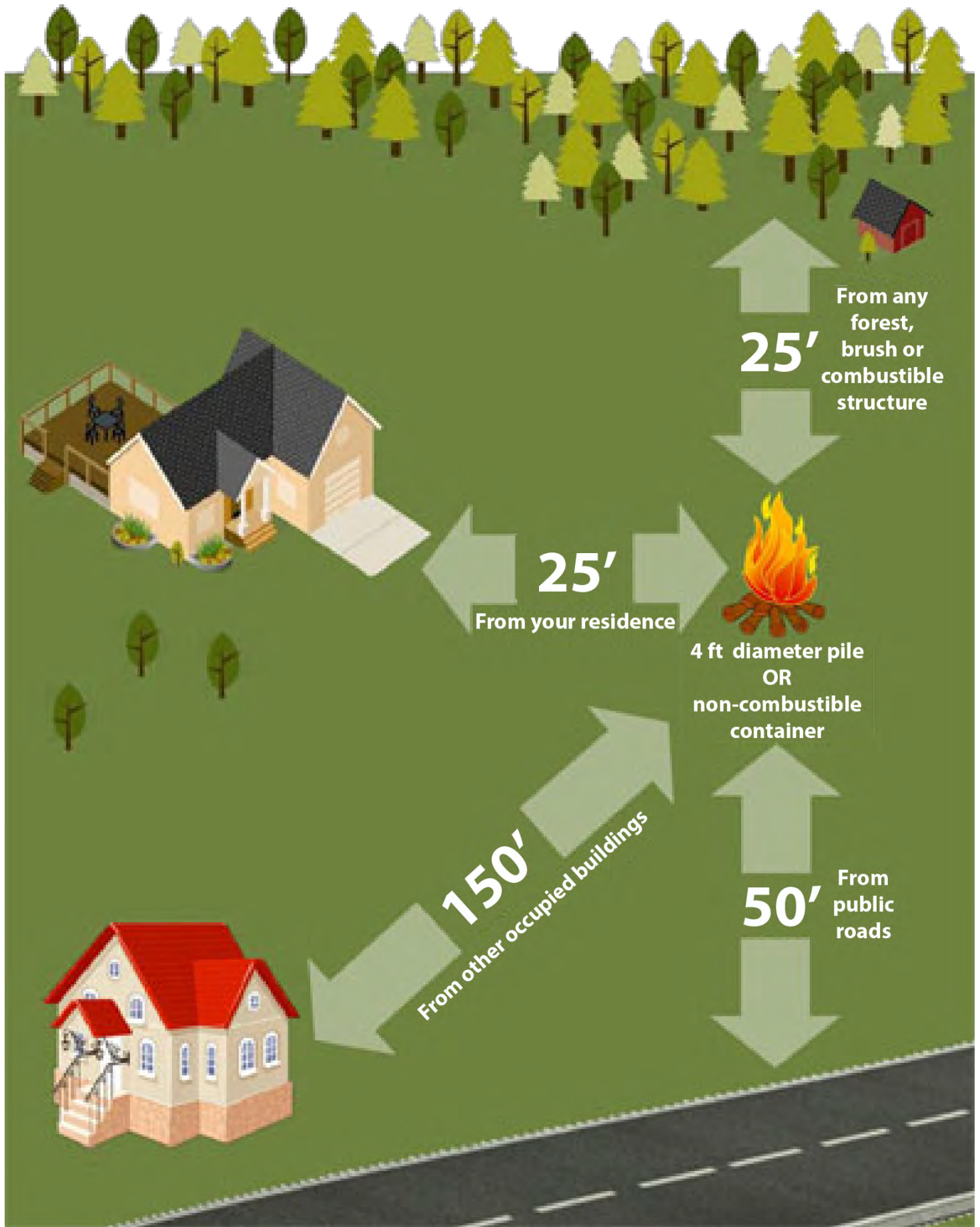
Radio Frequencies: People need to know what channels are being used. Most communications need to be going across the radio. If everyone is not on the same frequencies, then important information could be missed. The channels to include in this are the IA channel, the closest tower to use, and any frequency needed to talk to aircraft.

Fuel Type / Wind Speed and Direction / Slope and Aspect: All three of these items paint a picture to the dispatch and any incoming resource as to what may be encountered and what to anticipate. These are not only important on a fire but any incident we may respond to.

Special Hazards or Concerns: This is where the time is taken to point out anything that is above and beyond our normal incident hazards. An example would be a fire in an unexploded ordnance (UXO) area. These are things that need to be passed along to incoming resources.

So, the next time you're the first on-scene to an incident, take the five minutes and do a proper size up for dispatch. Those five minutes could save you hours of confusion in the future.

Chad Northcraft, Incident Management Specialist, DFFP





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