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File Code: 1416/5140

Date: October 23, 2002

Route To:

Subject: Escaped Prescribed Fire Review

To: Forest Supervisor, Deschutes NF
R6 Director Fire and Aviation Management

Attached is the Escaped Prescribed Fire Review Report and Action Plan for the Metolius RNA incident on October 10, 2002.

GEORGE I. CHESLEY

FMO, Central Oregon Fire Mgmt Services



1. COVER SHEET

ACTIVITY REVIEW REPORT And Action Plan FOR METOLIUS RNA PRESCRIBED FIRE ESCAPE

Date of Review: October 22, 2002

Review Team:

Erik Christiansen, Fuels Specialist SORO
Rock Gerke, Deputy Fire Staff COFMS
Karen Curtiss, Assistant Fire Staff COFMS

Overview of the activity being reviewed:

Metolius RNA units 12 and 62 were burned on October 9th. Both units were 28 acres in size and were re-entries from prescribed underburning accomplished in the previous 8-12 years. The prescribed fire ignition phase was straight-forward and uneventful. The following day at 0715, one of the Division's fuels techs visited the units on his way to work. He found a small spot fire outside the line on unit 12, lined it, and then went to his duty station and reported what he found. A six-person group arrived at the area at approximately 0900 to patrol and mop up hot spots as needed to contain the burn within its containment lines. The Burn Boss arrived on the units just before noon. His evaluation of the situation was that unit 12 had the most potential to cause problems due to the close proximity of snags and burning green trees to the containment lines. He ordered all the mop up and patrol forces to concentrate their actions on unit 12. At approximately 1500 hours, a large volume of smoke was observed on unit 62. The leader of the handcrew investigated and found the fire had escaped the containment lines and was burning rapidly uphill to the east. They initiated suppression activities including the use of aerially delivered retardant. The fire was kept under HF funding until October 11th when it continued to burn actively and required more retardant. On the morning of the 11th, the incident was declared an escape and placed under a fire suppression code.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- a. Objectives of the Review
 - 1) To prevent future escapes from occurring.
 - 2) To establish accountability.
 - 3) To determine if the Prescribed Fire Plan was adequate for the project.
 - 4) To determine if the prescription, actions, and procedures set forth on the Prescribed Fire Plan were followed.
 - 5) To determine if overall policy, guidance, and procedures relating to prescribed fire operations are adequate.
 - 6) To determine the level of awareness and the understanding of the personnel involved, in regard to procedures and guidance.
 - 7) To determine the extent of prescribed fire training and experience levels of personnel involved.
- b. The activity review was conducted in the Sisters RD conference room on October 22, 2002.
- c. Description of the findings
 - 1) The Burn Boss was distracted from his primary duties on the day of escape (10/10/02)
 - 2) Mop up and Patrol forces were not adequate for the task at hand on the day of the escape.
 - 3) The Burn Plan(s) was not adequate regarding guidance for resources needed for mop up and patrol.
 - 4) The Burn Plan(s) was not adequate regarding contingency resource needs.
 - 5) It was unclear to the Burn Boss as to who was "Acting" FMO for the Cascade Division.

3. COMMENDATIONS

*The Cascade Division has an aggressive fuels treatment program that includes use of prescribed fire in politically sensitive areas (i.e. WUI). These treated areas have been instrumental in the protection of houses during large wildland fire incidents in FY02.

*The successes in the Cascade Division far outweigh the number of escapes.

*The prescribed fire operations executed on October 9th were accomplished in a professional manner.

*When the prescribed fire escaped the boundaries unit 62 on October 10th, the actions taken to bring the fire into containment were aggressive and appropriate and provided for firefighter safety.

*The Fire Management Organization on the Cascade Division was candid and forthright in their review of the incident and the lessons learned from this experience.

4. STATEMENT OF FINDINGS

4A. **DISTRACTIONS**

Opening Statement: The Burn Boss was distracted from his primary job on the morning of 10/10/02.

Details: He had a medical appointment on the morning of October 10th. It was approximately noon before he was able to get out to the units. He then had to leave the units in order to attend a Smoke Mgmt Training session and was not able to return to the units before the escape occurred.

Alternative actions: 1) Management could have appointed another qualified individual as “Burn Boss” for October 10th. 2) Management could have taken the training session off the Burn Boss’s list of activities for October 10th.

4B. **INADEQUATE RESOURCES**

Opening Statement: Mop up and patrol forces were inadequate for the day of the escape.

Details: Mop up and patrol resources for 10/10/02 consisted of one engine crew (2 people) and one suppression crew (4 people). When the Burn Boss arrived at the units at noon, he determined that all available resources needed to engage in patrol and mop up activities on unit 12 as he felt the chances of escape were greater at that location. This left unit 62 with no resources on site for 2.5 to 3 hours.

Alternative actions: 1) The Burn Boss could have left two people as a minimum on unit 62 to ensure that the fire remained within the unit. 2) The Burn Boss could have requested additional resources be sent to the prescribed fire area to assist with mop up and patrol.

4C. **BURN PLAN GUIDANCE WAS LACKING**

Opening Statement: The burn plan was not adequate regarding giving guidance to the Burn Boss for resources needed during mop up and patrol activities.

Details: The burn plan displays a range of personnel/equipment needed to accomplish the mop up and patrol activities. It fails to provide any guidance for moving from minimal staffing to maximum staffing.

Alternative actions: 1) The specialist that developed the prescribed fire plan could have included guidance to the burn boss on resources needed based on current fire weather or expected fire behavior. 2) The Burn Boss could have discussed the planned staffing for 10/10/02 with the prescribed fire manager to ensure that the staffing levels were adequate from management’s point of view.

4D. **CONTINGENCY RESOURCES WERE INADEQUATE**

Opening statement: Contingency resources identified for the day of ignition (10/9/02) consisted of two engines. There were no contingency resources identified for day 2 (10/10/02).

Details: The two engines identified as contingency resources for the day of ignition (10/9/02) were obviously those resources that were available—and not the resources needed—as the units being burned were not near roads.

Alternative actions: Management could/should have identified contingency resources based on current/expected fire behavior.

4E. **UNCLEAR ROLES**

Opening statement: The Burn Boss did not know that an “Acting” FMO had been designated.

Details: The FMO had left the unit for a fire assignment. Before leaving she designated an “Acting” as she knew that burning season was at hand. The information contained in the E-mail message did not make it to the necessary players. This resulted in the Acting FMO not being notified that the prescribed burn was being undertaken and thereby did not have input into the staffing issues described previously.

Alternative actions: Management should have included a block in the burn plan to address any changes in critical leadership positions that are not available during the completion of the burn.

ACTION PLAN
For the Metolius RNA
Escaped Rx Fire Review and Report
October 23, 2002
Prepared by: RJ Gerke, Deputy FMO, COFMS

Please see report above. This report identifies some areas that need attention in order to meet the intention of the review objectives. The items listed below are directly related to the findings in the report from the activity review.

4A. Distractions.

Responsible Party: Division FMO.

Action: Will ensure that the leadership provided for each prescribed fire is free of other duties so that the burn, and subsequent mop up activities have proper oversight.

When: November 1, 2002

4B. Inadequate Resources.

Responsible party: Division FMO

Action: Will ensure that the resources necessary for the successful completion of all prescribed burn activities are adequate based on current and expected fire behavior.

When: November 1, 2002

4C. Burn Plan Guidance was lacking

Responsible party: Division FMO

Action: Ensure that the burn plan establishes adequate guidance for a Burn Boss to determination the adequacy of resources for all prescribed burn activities.

When: November 1, 2002

4D. Contingency resources were inadequate

Responsible Party: Division FMO

Action: Ensure that contingency planning is completed and that it is adequate for the day(s) of the burn and for subsequent mop up activities as well. Contingency resource needs will be based on a daily assessment of current and expected fire behavior.

When: November 1, 2002

4E. Unclear Roles

Responsible Party: COFMS FMO

Action: Develop a method for management decisions to get to the lowest levels of the COFMS organization. Conduct periodic tests to determine effectiveness of the communication method(s) employed. Ensure that “actings” are properly briefed on all activities—especially prescribed fires—that are scheduled.

When: March 30, 2003

The review team recommends that this report with action plan is shared/discussed with all members of the COFMS organization who have leadership roles in any prescribed fire activity.

