FIRE SHELTER DEPLOYMENT

CANYON CREEK FIRE (Elk Zone)

September 6, 1988

INVESTIGATION TEAM

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Stan Shields - Team Leader

Richard Kimberlain

Jim Hocking

INCIDENT BRIEF

On the afternoon of September 6, 1988, there was a multiple fire shelter deployment incident on the Canyon Creek Fire. A total of 107 people of Division A of the Elk Creek Zone deployed their shelters in a safety zone on the ridge between Moudess and Jakie creeks as the fire burned over the area. There were no fatalities involved or injuries requiring hospital treatment. All personnel of Division A, about 170, walked out of the area the next day around 0800 and the majority were released and demobilized home later on September 7, 1988.

NARRATIVE

Instructions for tactical control operations for personnel assigned to Division A were to "construct handline around slopover, finish burnout and start mop-up 2 chains in." Special instructions were to "complete burnout if not already completed." The weather information of the shift plan was based on a Missoula forecast of 1330 hours on 9/5/88. It called for a red flag alert for a wind shift and increase in velocity. Specifically it called for lower temperatures, higher RH and winds of 10-20 mph from the west across ridges. The fire behavior forecast indicated that wind changes would likely occur around mid-day and that rates of spread in the lodgepole type might more closely resemble those of Southern California chapparral. The shift plan safety message advised of probable extreme rates of spread and erratic fire behavior and to pre-plan escape routes, safety zones and the use of lookouts.

Division A fireline had previously been anchored at Welcome Pass and completed in a northeasterly direction to the confluence of Jakie and Smith creeks. Burnouts of indirect portions of the line had been conducted the previous day. Crews were lining and mopping up slopovers from these burnouts.

At 1124 on 9/6 a special "wind warning" was relayed by radio with all divisions confirming as having received. The warning stated "25-35 mph winds are starting to surface and should reach the east side of the Continental Divide within 2 hours. Take all necessary precautions. Have safe areas identified and ready to deploy to." Shortly thereafter the wind began to change to a more westerly direction.

Sometime between noon and 1500 hours the Division's designated safety zone was burned off to remove the light grass cover. When completed it measured approximately 300 by 500 feet (about 5 acres) in an oval shape on a side slope of about 25 to 30 percent facing southwest. It was located several hundred yards above the saddle through which Trail No. 214 passes going from Jakie Creek drainage into Moudess Creek in the SE 1/4 of Section 35. It was outside and adjacent to the fireline in about the center of Division A.

Around 1400 with wind direction generally from the west the velocities began to increase. At about 1500 lookouts reported spot fires from the Dearborn drainage over Welcome Pass into Moudess Cr. Wind gusts at this time were in the 50+ range with steady readings of 40 mph. The spot fires in Moudess immediately gained momentum and intensity. Overhead began an orderly withdrawal of personnel on Division A to the safety zone. Five of eight crews plus most of the overhead (total of 107) moved into the safety zone shortly after 1500 hours. The other three crews assigned to Division A and working farther down the line in Jakie Creek moved into previously burned out and cooled down areas inside the fireline.

Sometime around 1630 the main fire front blew through the saddle below the safety zone and all around its perimeter igniting gear stowed at the outer edges away from personnel locations. As the peak intensity of the fires ran over the safety zone, fire shelters were deployed as added protection against injury to personnel.

Despite the "winds warning" message of earlier in the day a number of individuals later expressed surprise at the velocities and duration of the winds that blew the fire out of the Dearborn watershed and on east to the plains. Some indicated that had they known of the potentially magnified local weather effects they might have considered getting clear of the area sooner.

FINDINGS

Except for minor injury from airborne embers, fire shelter deployment was not a necessary action in this situation to protect individuals from injury and/or fatality. The safety zone was well located and effective for its intended purpose, i.e., personnel welfare. It was not overly generous in size but adequate to accomplish the objective.

The pre-planning of escape routes and safety zones and their utilization and management was professionally handled by the overhead on site. Having gear and equipment stored safely away from where individuals were located undoubtedly prevented serious injury occurrences.

The use of fire shelters added to confidence levels and hence the control of personnel weathering the fire storm around the safety zone. The use of this personnel protective equipment may also have prevented some minor burns from flying embers.

Other feasible evacuation alternatives do not appear to have been available. No other safety zones of a larger size existed closer than about 6 or 7 miles away at the Goss ranch near DP-4. Foot travel down Jakie and Smith creeks and then around the ridge into the meadows below DP-4 would have been through dense timber which burned to total black during the fire front's run east. Had sufficient and appropriate vehicle transportation been available to pre-position, Division A personnel had sufficient time to retreat to DP-7 for pickup and evacuation from the area.

As for the lack of knowledge regarding local weather characteristics of the Rocky Mountain front country, i.e., the sustained, extremely strong velocity winds, it is difficult at best and speculative to say what effect having a locally experienced Fire Behavior Analyst (FBA) or Fire Weather Forecaster on site for the briefings would have had. The FBA assigned to the Elk Zone IC Team was not listed on overhead orders for the Canyon Creek Fire so home unit and experience background could not be immediately determined. Observed fire behavior in the lodgepole type from the previous day was well written up. However, no mention of local weather characteristics was included in the forecast. Mobile weather units and forecasters were in short supply and not all incidents were able to fill this need.

The crews were offered the counseling services of a Critical Incident Debriefing Team. Several crews took advantage of this service.

MAPS AND PHOTOS

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EXHIBITS

- Exhibit A Division Assignment List
- Exhibit B Shift Plan, Septebmer 6, 1988
- Exhibit C General Message Regarding Weather Changes
- Exhibit D September 5th News Release from RICO Regarding Worsening Weather Conditions

Exhibit E - Notification of Extreme Fire Situation (9/4/88)

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WEATHER

Received-from Missoury WEATHER at 1330 Monday - 9/5/88 Discussion: High PRESSURE THAT MAS BEEN OVER US is BEEINING TO_BREAK_DOWN_AHEAD_OF SEVERAL_OFF STORE WEATHER SYSTEMS_ THAT WILL MOVE THROUGH THE REGION DURING THE NEXT FEW DAYS. RED___ FLAG IS IN EFFECT FOR WIND SHIFT TONITE AND FOR STRONGER WEST WINDS THESPAY WITH THE FRONTAL PASSAGE. WEATHER OUTLOOK FOR THE SDAY _ FRONFAL PASSAGE ABOUT MIDDAY ____TEMPERATURES DOWN 10-15°F COLER ___ RELATIVE HUNIDITY_UP By 10% a t -WINDE WEST 10-20 HPH ACROSS THE RIDGES WEDNESPAY :- STILL WIN ON - WITH NO RAID IN SIGHT

BEHAVIOR FORECAST NO. 12 PREDICTION FOR: Day SHIF NAME OF FIRE: <u>Canyon Creek (West Zome</u>) FOREST: <u>Lource & Clank</u> SHIFT DATE: 9/6/88 (0600-1. TIME AND DATE FORECAST ISSUED: 2200 9/5/88 SIGNED: H. B. Fritz Caho M FIRE EEHAVIOR OFFICER WEATHER SUMMARY SEE ATTACHED FORSCAST (PREDICTED WIND-1200 NOON) FIRE BEHAVIOR The predicted winds today could trugger some hat pues GENERAL: and cause spotting problems in many areas of the fire and could generate many new problems throughout the fire a The most critical period still be Thready through wednesday. The wind direction and in some cases the velocity will be redirected by existing topography. SPECIFIC: The best information of when the wind will hit will Je about norn. This will be verified at the morning briefing as more information is gleaned from weather to to the west of our fire are monitored Fire Belavior in Dir A in the late afternon of Monday 9/5/88 indicate that dense dordgepole Stands once fired off act more like don. Calif. Chaparral (Fuel Tupe 4) then what they are. Several runs are illustrated on the following pages. It is possible that if the forecasted wind strikes, most of the Jucle types on the fire rates of spread, spotting potential and heat production levels will double tiple or act. like another fuel type rather then what they may be classified as, buchas Lodgepole pine becoming Chycanal.

AIR OPERATIONS: SMSKY In AM probably cleaning at about 10-1.

SAFETY: BE ALERT AND DON'T GET HORT. WATCH FOR Rates of Spread, spotting way beyond what would be expected if the

Lodgepole Pine- acting like Chaperral] i		••	
1 MODEL # 4		TYPICAL Fuel type 8		
2 1H 3.0 3 10H 4.0		1 NODEL \$ 8		
4 199H 5.0 6 WOOD 65 7 NFWS 7 14 21		2 1H 3. 0 3 10H 4.0 4 100H 5.0		
7 NFWS 7 14 21 8 SLP 45 9 WDIR 180	· · · · ·	7 HFNS 7 14 21 8 SLP 35	1 1	
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MFNS 7 14 21				2 1H 2.0 3 19H 3.9
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9 4 FL 47.3 63.3 77.2 5 RI 14251 14251 1425		5 RI 1109 1109 1109 6 ENS 5.6 11.3 11.3 7 MAXB 189 130_180		
1 6 ENS 12.6 19.9 27.8 7 MAXE 180 180 180				



Incident:	Date: Time:
Conyon Greek Elle Bronch	9-6-88 Day shift
Major Hazards and Risks:	
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Fatigue	
Narrative:	
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drop zome are clear of people	
We all need to continue to stores	
A MMA	TED TUBIOT
	Safety Officer
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	O biain current information on fire status.
	R emain in communication with crew members, your supervisor, and adjoining forces.
F ight fire aggressively, but provide for safety first.	D etermine safety zones and escape routes. E stablish lookouts in potentially hazardous situations.
I nitiate all action based on current and expected fire behavior.	Retain control at all times.
R ecognize current weather conditions and obtain forecasts.	
E naure instructions are given and understood.	S tay alert, keep calm, think clearly, act decisively.

SAFETY BRIEFING/CHECKLIST TOPICS The following checklists are intended to serve as personal safety reminders or short briefing topics for subordinates before going out on your assignment.

Safety Practices Under Blowup Conditions

- a. Be Alert to Indicators of Sudden Weather Changes
 - Trees crowning out inside fireline.
 - Smouldering fires picking up over large areas.
 - Approaching thunderheads with dark clouds beneath.
 - Presence of dust devils and whirlwinds.
 - Sudden calm.
 - High clouds moving fast in direction different from surface wind.
- b. Be Aware of "Watch Out" Working Situations
 - Building fireline down into canyon bottom where fire is burning.
 - Building fireline on hillside beneath fire.
 - Building fireline through heavy cover at considerable distance from fire.
 - Building fireline in country not seen in daytime.
- c. Have Clear-Cut Plan of Action for Potential Blowup Conditions
 - Give crew frequent rest periods.
 - Know location of rock slides, open hillsides, streams, and gravel bars.
 - Post lookout to give alarm when firefighters are working where they cannot directly observe danger points.
 - Consider possibility of retreating into burn.
 - When crossing fire edge into burn, have crew protect faces.
 - Do not travel in direction of spread unless certain a safe spot can be reached.

Common Denominators of Fire Behavior on Tragedy Fires

- a. Most incidents happen on the smaller fires or on isolated portions of larger fires.
- b. Most fires are innocent in appearance before the "flare-ups" or "blow-ups." In some cases, tragedies occur in the mop-up stage.
- c. Flare-ups generally occur in deceptively light fuels.
- d. Fires run uphill surprisingly fast in chimneys, gullies, and on steep slopes.
- e. Some suppression tools, such as helicopters or air tankers, can adversely affect fire behavior. The blasts of air from low flying helicopters and air tankers have been known to cause flare-ups.

A. Minor walk-in injuries at Camp.

Treat at incident command post medical unit.

- 8. Line Injuries
 - 1. If crew supervisor feels the injury will prevent crew member from continuing to end of shift procedure will be to:
 - A. Apply First Aid as needed
 - B. Contact Strike Team Leader and Division Group Supervisor.
 - C. Contact Communications with details or relay to Medical Unit Leader and Safety Officer.
 - D. If an EMT crew member is near, Medical Unit Leader can contact for primary exam.
 - E. If patient is to be extricated from line due to traumatic or life threatening injuries. Medical Unit Leader to contact Augusta Information Station Dispatcher for Medivac Helicopter or ambulance arrangements. Extrication will be accomplished by most efficient transport available. Medical Unit Leader to evaluate and arrange for whatever treatment or steps necessary.
 - 2. After treatment, patient will be:
 - A. Returned to duty if fit.
 - B. Kept in camp if necessary.
 - C. Transportation for further medical help.
 - D. Released to home unit if unable to continue with regular duties.

SAFETY MESSAGE

Crews. Know your escape routes and safety zones. Be sure you are wearing all required safety gear. If you boots are worn out, replace them. Drink

If working around dozers, watch out for: loose rolling material, trees that may be pushed over--keep a safe working distance at all times. Check for hazard trees in your work area. Listen and Stay Alert for burn out operations.

Camp. Keep all garbage cleaned up to help deter hornets and wasps. Use caution when drinking or eating. Several folks have been stung while eating.

Drivers. Yield to larger vehicles, be prepared to stop within half your sight distance. Learn where turnouts are located. Use chock blocks when parked.

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L.E. Smith Safety Officer

MEDICAL DI AM	1, INCIDENT	TNAME	2. DATE PREPAREI	3, TIM PRE	E PARED 4.	OPERATI		PERIOD	I				
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TIME	9/5/88		ASSIGNMENT	Div. #	りた。G	Div.C	Div. U Div. E	Air Operations	HELIBASE	EMETGENCY USA	DNLY .	Fire Line to	IC P		¢
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CANYON CREEK FIRE CIVIL RIGHTS / EED REPRESENTATI. The Civil Rights / EEO Representative for the fire is <u>CHUCK</u> TRIBE, Chuck will be dividing his time between the Elk Creek and Kleinschmidt Flat camps. He can be contacted through the Finance Officer in each camp. Chuck is available to talk to any crew or crew member about Civil Rights or Equal Employment_matters Any Overhead that is involved in or oware of any situation that could have civil Rights or EEO implication. should contact Chuck.

Pay Claritication: <u>ALL Employees are paid for the time worked</u> Employees are NOT Compensated for meal or sleep til (exception: Lunch break for personnel on the fireline of an uncontrolled fire is not deducted.) Contrary to rumors going around you are not on the payroll from the time you are called. Your Pay begans when you load on the bus to be transported to the fireline and stops when you arrive back of Camp <u>TF you are placed in "Coyote Tactics" your</u> pay stops when your Crew is set off the line ie The Division Sup. Says "that's it for today." As long as you are provided food and a bedroll you are NOT Compensated for your down time. One other item of Confusion is the Shour Sleeprile. The Shour sleep rule only applies to Structure fires.

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Exhibit C C Ō C C 0 ſ $\widehat{}$ G TUS. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: **GENERAL MESSAGE** POSITION Line Personne TO: FRO POSITION SUB. MESSAGE: winds mak -.00 Derio us 111 NATURE/POS REPLY 1125 J<u>RS. (</u> DATE TIME SIGNATURE/POSITION 9-6 1124 0 213 ICS 1/79 NFES 1336 PERSON RECEIVING GENERAL MESSAGE KEEP THIS COPY

NEWS RELASE

Exhibit D

Aerial Fire Depot September 5, 1988 Contact: Dale Dufour (406) 329-4920

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WEATHER THREATENS TO MORSEN FIRE CONDITIONS

MISSOULA, MT -- Prolonged hot and dry weather conditions have resulted in critically dry fuels throughout the forest, park, and rangelands of the Northern Rocky Mountains. A potential change in the current weather system has prompted Federal and State fire management officials, working in conjunction with the Weather Service, to issue a public alert for possible extreme fire behavior conditions on existing as well as on any new fires.

According to Jim Mann, USDA Forest Service Director of Aviation and Fire Management in Missoula and speaking on behalf of the officials, a weather system could result in potentially high winds and extreme burning conditions in Idaho. Montana, and the Greater Yellowstone Area. This change in burning activity appears to be most likely to occur between late this afternoon and Wednesday.

Mann stated that if the weather frontal passage develops as feared, winds could result in sustained runs on existing wildfires.

Officials from all land managing agencies are asking for the continuing cooperation of everyone to use caution and help prevent any new fires. Mann also said that firefighters and other people working on existing fires are being advised to stay alert for changing weather conditions and erratic fire behavior during this critical time.

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NOTE: This news release is issued by the Multi-Agency Coordinating Group in Missoula, Montana. Members include: Forest Service, National Park Service, State of Montana, State of Idaho, State of North Dakota, Montana National Guard, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Bureau of Land Management.

FIRE BEHAVIOR ALERT

The Forest Lands of Idaho and Montana have been brought to a critical dry stage by the current hot and dry weather pattern. The breakdown of this persistent weather pattern by an approaching dry. cold-front on Monday and Tuesday will likely supply strong, sustained winds for several hours as the front passes. This could trigger extreme fire behavior such as running crown fires and long distance spotting on existing fires, or any new ignition source. The time period of critical concern will likely extend from Monday afternoon through Tuesday for north Idaho and western Montana, and Tuesday through Wednesday for extreme SW Montana and Yellowstone National Park.

The mixture of weather, dry fuel and existing wildfires are contributing to dangerous circumstances. Historically, similar conditions have resulted in catastrophic fires of short duration. The 1967 Sundance fire in northern Idaho, and the 1981 "Black Thursday" fires in Alberta are examples of what can happen.

Be sure to consult with your local, or incident fire weather forecaster for information concerning your local situation.

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RICO FIRE BEHAVIOR SERVICE CENTER, 9/05 am

-- FIRE BEHAVIOR WARNING --

A DRY COLD-FRONT IS EXPECTED TO ARRIVE IN OUR AREA THIS AFTERNOON/EARLY EVENING FROM THE PACIFIC COAST. STRONG WINDS FROM THE SOUTHEAST-SOUTHWEST WILL PRECEDE THE FRONTAL PASSAGE. THEN SHIFT TO SUSTAINED MODERATE WINDS FROM THE WEST. WITH FUEL MOISTURES AT CRITICALLY LOW LEVELS BECAUSE OF THE PRESISTENT HIGH PRESSURE RIDGE AND SUBSIDENCE INVERSION, THE FIRE DANGER IS EXTREME. THE APPROACHING COLD-FRONT COULD TRIGGER EXTREME FIRE BEHAVIOR RESULTING IN RUNNING CROWN FIRES AND LONG DISTANCE SPOTTING IN FOREST FUELS. FIRES OF THIS NATURE HAVE HISTORICALLY BURNED TO THE NORTHEAST DURING SHORT (4-10 HRS), CATASTROPHIC BURNING PERIODS. VERY LITTLE, IF ANY MOISTURE IS EXPECTED WITH THIS SYSTEM. THERE ARE NO INDICATIONS THAT THIS WILL BE AN END OF THE SEASON EVENT.

THE NORTHWESTERN PORTION OF THE REGION WILL BE AN END OF THE SEASON EVENT. THE FRONT STARTING LATE THIS AFTERNOON. THE PROBABILITY OF A SHORT/CATASTROPHIC BURNING PERIOD IS GREATEST IN THIS AREA. FRONTAL INFLUENCE IN EXTREME SW MONTANA AND THE YELLOWSTONE ECOSYSTEM WILL BE ON TUESDAY AND WEDNESDAY. BE SURE TO CONSULT YOUR LOCAL, OR INCIDENT FIRE WEATHER FORECASTER FOR INFORMATION CONCERNING YOUR LOCAL SITUATION.

There are many ingredients coming together for this potentially dangerous situation, some are already in place, we are closely monitoring others to see if they_will occur. As with all events involving weather, accurate prediction is difficult. Historically fires such as the n. Idaho Sundance fire in 1967 and the "Black Thursday" fires in Alberta in 1981 occurred under similar conditions. These conditions include; 1) a source of ignition (which we currently have many and strong winds many provide others), 2) heavy forest fuels, 3) a persistent high pressure ridge, 4) a subsidence inversion which drys the fuel bed over extensive areas for an extended period, 5) a cold-front with strong winds breaking the persistent high pressure system, 6) the cold-front approaching existing mountain ranges in a parallel direction so the frontal winds become oriented with north-south mountain valleys, 7) the development of low level jets, or reverse wind profiles with the approaching cold-front. Items 1-4 are inplace, item 5 is begining to occur and alignment at this time appears proper for item 6, and item 7 we will just have to wait If this event does not happen, that would be great, however lets be prepared.

Fuel moisture recovery last night was again poor across most of the Region (fourth night in a row). Moderate recovery was reported from the Clearwater, NezPerce, Beaverhead, Gallatin National Forests, and the northwest portion of Yellowstone National Park. These areas with moderate recovery have had extensive smoke coverage which may be influencing the daily flucuation in moisture content. Fire behavior reports from across the Region last night indicate that while active burning continued the fires were generally well behaved and in most cases were laid down below the smoke.

The subsidence inversion last night dropped to near surface elevations at all three sounding locations, strong temperature inversions also exists across the Region ranging in depth from 2-4,000'. Winds are currently light at the lower elevations (mostly 0-5 mph and variable in direction), but over Boise and Great Falls they begin to pick-up in velocity at approximately 10,000' (10 mph) and above 18,000' they are 25-30 mph. Upper level zone of freezing temperatures begins at approximately 14,000' and has dropped since yesterday.

For the week ending August 27th of the 44 weather service stations used to compile the weekly precipitation report thirty-two received no measurable precipitation, and seven received 0.05" or less. No precipitation was reported from the SE, S-central, and SW divisions. Currently in terms of the growing season (April 1- August 27) most of western Montana is normal in precipitation received (90-110%) or above normal (110-130%), southwestern Montana and the eastern Rocky Mountain front is below normal (70-90%) with a broad finger in the same moisture range extending NE through Jefferson, Judith Basin, and into Phillips counties. Most of eastern Montana and the "Hi-line" are much below normal (<70%).

-- Chuck Bushey commercial 329-4850 (FTS 584) DG RICOPLANS:R01D

Exhibit E

DRAFT - 9/4/88 - 1800 S.PALM/S.ROGERS

FIREFIGHTER NOTIFICATION OF EXTREME FIRE SITUATION (See attached Fire Behavior Alert)

- 1. Shift Briefing and Pre-Shift Requirement:
- a. Refamiliarize with F-I-R-E O-R-D-E-R-S and 18 WATCH OUT SITUATIONS.
 - b. Refer to "Some Common Denominators of Fire Behavior on Tragedy or Nea

r

Miss Forest Fires".

c. Plan safe zones, make them known.

Ensure that every firefighter, (includes camp personnel within potential fire caution areas), is equipped with prescribed P.P.E. to include: fire shelter, nomex clothing, hard hat, gloves and boots.

- 2. During Shift Assignment and Announced Precautionary Period:
 - a. Maintain an ALERT and "HEADS UP" position throughout assignment.
 - b. If the situations warrant--disseminate word to assigned firefighter personnel immediately.
 - c. Confirm and maintain total accountability!
 - d. Maintain communications--ON LINE, with fire service partners and cooperators/neighbors as appropriate.
 - e. Document actions and events.

DRAFT - 9/4/88 - 1800 S.PALM/S.ROGERS

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