

Season Preparation

NEWSLETTER – SPRING 2021



NATIONAL WILDFIRE COORDINATING GROUP (NWCG)
Risk Management Committee - Mental Health Subcommittee



WORKING IN WILDLAND FIRE

Frequent fire assignments away from your home station can be a challenging, lengthy, and consistent reality. Proper preparation can help minimize stress and anxiety for personnel and their families.

The more prepared our employees, families, and loved ones are to cope with the absence of wildland fire personnel, the easier it will be to give support and adjust to maintain healthy relationships. Preparing yourself and your loved ones prior to the season will also contribute to maintaining good mental health.

Preparation for extended periods away, working long hours and on days off, includes being aware of the terms and rules related to the job. It is essential for families and loved ones to understand length of assignments and work/rest guidelines to better prepare and provide support to the wildland firefighter. Chapter 7 of the *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations* (Red Book), <https://www.nifc.gov/sites/default/files/redbook-files/Chapter07.pdf>, can help you communicate these guidelines.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Leadership: As a supervisor, are you considering the impacts extended assignments (longer than 14 days) will have on personnel and their families?

Be Patient: Openly communicating to your support system prior to fire season will benefit you and your family. Feelings of frustration, detachment, and loneliness are common before fire season. Remember, these emotions may be a result of the upcoming season and not a reflection on your relationships with family members. Be patient with yourself, and practice mindfulness techniques to decrease stress and anxiety.

Be Flexible: Maintaining communication and understanding will help relieve frustrations about unpredictable assignment locations and duration. Not knowing when you will be gone and where you will be may cause feelings of frustration to arise between you and your loved ones. Be flexible and adapt to changes in schedule with good communication and empathy towards crew members and family.



WORKPLACE PREPAREDNESS

Emergency Notification Information: Update your information about whom you would like the government to contact on your behalf in case of an emergency.

Designation of Beneficiary: Life Insurance, FERS, TSP, and other plans require a designation of a beneficiary. This includes the issuance of your final paycheck if something should happen to you.

Too often, a designation of beneficiaries does not get updated, and the compensation may go those designated in the past, not to the present individuals you want receiving those benefits.



FAMILY AND LOVED ONES

Ask yourself the following questions when activating your readiness plan:

- How might fire season affect my family?
- Will fire season require a change in how I care for my children?
- Do we need to establish new roles for disciplining our children?
- Have we discussed how important decisions will be made while I am away? Am I ok with decisions being made without my input?
- Have we openly discussed concerns and fears about my fire season?
- Can my spouse/partner take over the household tasks I usually perform, or do we need to arrange and budget for someone else to do them?
- Does my spouse/partner/family know how to contact me in case of an emergency?
- How might my relationship be affected because of this separation?
- Have my spouse/partner/family and I discussed how we will stay in contact during our separation? Have we agreed on realistic goals and expectations?
- Have you discussed the impacts of inaccurate (or accurate) media reporting or social media posts?

IMPORTANT STEPS

- Review your property insurance coverage and make sure someone you trust has copies of the information.
- Arrange for pet care now, know who will be caring for your animals when you go on assignment, and make sure they can be available on short notice at odd hours.
- Replace filters on heating and air conditioning systems.
- Make sure your spouse/partner or someone else knows how to turn off the hot water heater, water pump, gas mains, and any other major household systems.
- Label fuses and circuit breakers and show your family or others how to use them.
- Consider a lawn service.
- Prepare a will. Complete a power of attorney so someone you trust can conduct business on your behalf, or designate someone to make health care decisions on your behalf.
- Register for online access to your accounts. Obtain PINs. Share the information with someone you trust.
- Establish automatic payment plans to have your bills paid.
- Review your financial arrangements. Make sure all financial accounts are shared with your spouse/partner or someone you trust.
- Place important documents in a safe or safety deposit box. Make sure you share safe code or list signers with those you wish to grant access to.
- Consider obtaining spare glasses and/or contacts.
- If you require medical prescriptions, make sure they won't expire during fire season. If you need to see your physician to update the prescription, schedule it now to ensure you won't be left without medications during the season and on the fireline.
- Make sure your car registration is up to date.