



Memorandum No. 15-004

Date: 21 April 2015

TO: NWCG Executive Board Members
FROM: Dan Smith, Chair, NWCG Executive Board
SUBJECT: NWCG Safety Zone Standards

The National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) defines a safety zone as an area cleared of flammable materials used for escape in the event the line is outflanked or in case a spot fire causes fuels outside the control line to render the line unsafe. Size calculations and other safety zone information are provided in the NWCG Incident Response Pocket Guide (IRPG) and other NWCG publications and training courses. These calculations are based on the best available information at the time they were developed. For safety zone size decisions, as in every other area of fire operations, judgment is required.

Research related to establishing more accurate safety zone size calculations is underway at the Missoula Fire Science Laboratory. Preliminary results have been shared in various venues in an effort to stimulate thought and generate input from the wildland fire community. When research results are finalized, NWCG guidance on safety zone size will be updated as necessary. Until then, existing standards remain valid.

Most critically, we cannot overemphasize the importance of good judgment in the application of any standard, including that of safety zone size determination. As stated in the IRPG, "Separation distance between the firefighter and the flames should be at least four times the maximum continuous flame height. . . Safety zones downwind or upslope from the fire may require larger separation distances" (pg.8). When applying a standard such as this, no firefighter can do wrong by calculating conservatively and, when in doubt, erring on the side of caution.

Questions or input regarding the ongoing research should be directed to the research engineer leading the project, Dr. Bret Butler at bwbutler@fs.fed.us. Questions about safety zone training, guidance, or standards should be directed to NWCG Operations Branch Coordinator, Tim Blake at tblake@blm.gov.

Please share this with the firefighters and fire managers in your agencies.

cc: NWCG Staff; Ted Mason, Chair, Risk Management Committee