



**National Advanced Fire & Resource Institute
Managed by the US Forest Service**

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BRIEFING PAPER: Changes to S520 Advanced Incident Management Course

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ACTION:

In 2015 the S-520 Advanced Incident Management Course Development Subcommittee announced changes to future S-520 course deliveries.

The first of these changes was implemented in the 2016 S-520 delivery with very positive feedback from students and faculty. Based on a general review of the course content and delivery method, additional steps are being taken to re-design S-520 to better reflect the current fire culture and incident management environment. Additional course design modifications will continue for the next two years. These steps are intended to ensure we continue delivering S-520 courses that are dynamic and are part of an evolving curriculum which fosters a robust learning environment.

BACKGROUND:

Is S-520 a training course or an evaluation? This question has been asked for years.

In our historic model, S-520 was either Pass or Fail. Failures required the student to return and take the same course and same simulation prior to certification as Type 1 C&G Staff.

In the 2016 model, S-520 *is a training course* wherein instructor-led material is delivered to the students in conjunction with a series of simulation exercises. The course still contains a final simulation of a high complexity incident(s) that is evaluated by Subject Matter Experts (SME). Clear feedback on performance during the simulation, along with any recommendations for improvement, are shared with the student. The purpose of SMEs written evaluation is to assist the student's host unit/certifying officials with making the final determination of whether Type 1 C&GS certification should be granted.

Why the need to change?

S-520 was created years ago as a means to evaluate candidates for Type 1 IMTs prior to the advent of Position Task Books (PTBs) and "Red Card" committees (for many of the agencies). Historically, S-520 was the final step in achieving this certification based on individual and team performance during the final simulation. The changes outlined above are intended to better align S-520 with the majority of NWCG courses and to promote greater involvement and learning; in essence, to create a learning culture, consistent with our stated desire to develop as learning organizations, during the course and move away from a pass/fail environment.

How is this different?

- 1) All students must fully participate in the S-520 Advanced Incident Management Course, including all simulations, to receive a Certificate of Completion.
- 2) All students participating in the Final Simulation will continue to be evaluated by a panel of fully qualified Type 1 Command and General Staff subject matter experts and simulation team role players.
- 3) At the conclusion of the final simulation, all students will receive an evaluation with a final rating recommending:
 - a. No additional training needed for Type 1 certification (performed well in simulation)

OR

 - b. Additional training needed for Type 1 certification (did not perform well in simulation)
- 4) All participants receiving a Certificate of Completion will receive the training competency for attending S-520 regardless of the simulation evaluation.
- 5) Students who receive a recommendation of “No Additional Training Needed” will receive written documentation for use by the student’s host agency/certifying official supporting consideration for Type 1 certification.
- 6) Students who receive a recommendation of “Additional Training Needed” will receive a written evaluation outlining deficiencies and areas of improvement.
 - a. The evaluation is for consideration by the student’s host agency/certifying official.
 - b. Students receiving this evaluation may be granted the training competency and will *NOT be required to re-take the course unless directed by the host agency.*
 - c. Based on the evaluation, host agency/certifying official may opt to exercise their own discretion with regard to the student’s Type 1 certification. Range of options include but not limited to:
 - i. Certify the student based on personal knowledge of student past performances on Type 1 incidents.
 - ii. Require the student repeat S-520.
 - iii. Develop a unique training plan to address recommendations identified in the S-520 evaluation. Upon successful completion of the training plan, host agency/certifying official may certify the employee without repeating S-520.
 - d. NAFRI and the S520 Course Development Subcommittee will continue to offer support to the host agencies/home units and preference in selection for students that certifying officials require to return to S520 to demonstrate the recommended improvements.
- 7) Certification at the Type 1 level will remain the responsibility of the host agency/certifying official.
- 8) Type 1 Team participation will remain the responsibility of the Geographic Area Coordinating Group.
- 9) These changes are not retroactive.

Direct questions to:

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