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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

Department of Agriculture—Forest Service
Washington, D. C. 20250

TO : Regional Foresters, Area Directors, Station Directors, WO Division Directors

File No. 5100

FROM : Edward P. Cliff, Chief

Date: April 14, 1967

SUBJECT: Fire Control

Your reference:

On November 30, 1966, I sent copies of the Loop Fire Analysis Group's report to Regional Foresters and at the same time assigned a Fire Safety Review Team to recommend an action program. The review team has completed its work and their report is enclosed. We have included comments from this office, made assignments and set target dates for doing the tasks necessary to make firefighting safer.

The most immediate responsibility rests with Fire Control and line personnel in the National Forest System. But multiple management requirements are present so several resource and support divisions will also be involved. Specific efforts will be required from Fire Research, especially in the longer term aspects of the program. Through State and Private forestry activities, the program's benefits can be extended to State and local agencies who fight forest, brush and grass fires. Regional Foresters must lead out on this, but to do the job requires coordination and teamwork.

Each element in the fire safety action plan applies in varying degrees to different parts of the U. S.--some with equal force everywhere we fight fires, others limited more to local geographical areas. But the places where men are killed or injured by burning can be more specifically pinpointed. It almost always happens in fuels that burn in a flashy manner and 65 percent of the time it happens in California. When establishing priorities, financing and otherwise in carrying out the program, I want these factors considered. In doing so, the common practice of moving firefighters from one part of the country to fight fire in another should be kept in mind. Then, in addition to fireline safety, some measures in the action plan have potential to reduce the incidence of large fires and their subsequent control costs and damage. To apply measures where safety gains can be made has first priority, but after that we must spread the program to capture the economic and resource-saving benefits included in it.

The Fire Safety Review Team believed, and I am convinced, that we are making progress in fighting fires aggressively while at the same time reducing hazards to firefighters. We began an accelerated fire safety

program similar to this one ten years ago. Although we have made progress since then, we have to do better. The record shows 32 of 83 firefighters killed from burning in the past twenty years have died since 1957. We are barely keeping pace with the increasing risks and hazards of modern forest firefighting.

Fortunately, several safety measures can be started right away. Target dates in the report are set to implement these before the next fire season in the West. Meanwhile, work should begin on the measures designed to more permanently reduce the hazards of large fires.

It is frustrating to learn from the report of the material gap between what we know to be safe practices and what is actually practiced on the fireline. To get this fire safety action plan fully extended to effective and safe performance is of special concern to me as it must be to you. Obviously, it is not enough to have the knowledge, the equipment or the technology. There is little pay off in safety until these measures are fully committed to action by well-informed, well-trained and well-directed firemen. Safety men should join with line and fire staff officers in an all out effort to get this done.

All concerned have a role in extending the program and all must redeem it. But the personnel most advantageously situated to extend full application of safe practices to the fireline are Forest Supervisors, Forest Fire Staffs, District Rangers and Fire Control Assistants. The Division of Fire Control is preparing for their use guidance materials containing key information and describing the actions necessary to implement the program. When ready, these materials will be distributed to Regional Foresters who will then use them in accordance with management practices in their Regions.

Enclosure

Edward P. Cliff