

# Staff Ride

## Resources



Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program

## Rattlesnake Fire – Tactical Decision Games

### Rattlesnake Fire TDGS #1a – (Operational Level)

To be handed out enroute to Stand 1.

To be conducted after arriving at Forest Boundary Parking Area.

It is July 9th at 14:30. You are working on the Mendocino National Forest and are out on fire prevention patrol today. You have two years of fire experience, but are very familiar with this area. You are by yourself and just returning from a small arson fire, the Chrome Fire, which is manned by a CDF crew and several USFS firefighters. It is assumed that fire will shortly be under control. As you turn onto this road, Alder Springs Road, you notice a wisp of smoke that appears to be coming from the mouth of Powderhouse Canyon near Oleta Point.

The conditions are as follows:

- Temperature: Current 85°  
Forecast 91° high / 58° low tonight
- RH: Current 24%  
Forecast 20% low / 55% high tonight
- Wind: Current Upslope @ 3-5 mph  
Forecast South to West @ 5-10 mph
- There are hardly any clouds in the sky – just some scattered cumulus. There has not been any lightning in the area for over 30 days.
- Fuels are much as you see them now – heavy chaparral. Normal seasonal curing has occurred. Fire season is just starting in this area. Powderhouse Canyon has not burned in 40+ years.
- You need to call this fire into the Mendocino Dispatch office in Willows. Assume you have full radio contact. What is your report on conditions?

## Rattlesnake Fire TDGS #1b – (Tactical Level)

To be handed out at Stand 1.

To be conducted at Stand 1.

It is again July 9 and the time is now 14:40. You are still the Fire Prevention Patrol person. You have made contact and called in your report on conditions to the dispatch office in Willows. Help is on the way, but it will be 30 minutes before the first incoming resources arrive.

1. You are all by yourself- just you and your shovel. What will you do?

2. What information will you be prepared to give the incoming resources?

## Rattlesnake Fire TDGS #2 – (Tactical Level)

To be handed out at Stand 1.

To be conducted at Stand 2, preferably with good view of canyon and flanks.

It is July 9 and the time is now 15:15. You are an Engine Captain on the Mendocino National Forest. You have 500 gallons of water, some hose and hand tools, and four additional crewmembers. Each crewmember has a year or two of fire experience. You arrive at Oleta Point and tie in with the Fire Prevention Patrol. After a quick briefing and size-up, you want to take action before the fire gets any bigger. The current conditions are as follows:

- Temperature: 87°
- RH: 23%
- Wind: South to West @ 5-7 mph
- Fuels: Heavy chamise and manzanita
- Slope: Steep, especially the cutbank off the road.

1. What are your orders to your crew and the Fire Prevention Patrol Person?

## Rattlesnake Fire TDGS #3 – (Operational Level)

To be handed out at Stand 2.

To be conducted at Stand 3.

It is now 16:00. You are the Duty Officer on the district. You have considerable fire experience, and are told to assume command of the fire until the Forest Fire Management Officer arrives on scene. When that individual arrives, it is understood that they will become the new Incident Commander and you will be the Ops Chief. Although a CDF handcrew has arrived, initial attack efforts have failed. You currently have an engine crew, a handcrew, and a prevention patrol person on the fire.

You now need to regroup and come up with a plan of action. You know that Powderhouse Turn has an excellent view of the whole fire area, and tell your resources to meet you there. Current conditions are as follows:

- Temperature : 88°
- RH: 22%
- Wind: South to West @ 5-7 mph
- Take note of the fuels and slope between Stand 3 and 4.
- Fire is currently moving upslope to the west along both sides of Oleta Ridge. It is moving toward Rattlesnake Ridge, almost ½ mile from the Point of Origin.

1. What are your immediate instructions to your resources?

2. Prepare your briefing to the incoming IC. What will you recommend?

## Rattlesnake Fire TDGS #4a – (Strategic Level)

To be handed out at Stand 3.

To be conducted at Stand 4.

You are the Forest Fire Management Officer. You are the most experienced person on the fire and firefighters are confident in your ability to lead control efforts on brushfires. However, a decade earlier, you were the Incident Commander on a fire where several firefighters were killed in a fire entrapment. The investigation report from that fire placed partial blame for the tragedy with you and your Ops Chief.

You have met up with the Duty Officer at the Powderhouse Turn shortly after 16:30. He briefs you on the current fire conditions and suppression efforts thus far. You now assume command of the Rattlesnake Fire and make the Duty Officer your Ops Chief.

1. Having fully briefed you, the Duty Officer is waiting your orders. What instructions do you give this individual who is now your Ops Chief?

## Rattlesnake Fire TDGS #4b – (Tactical Level)

To be handed out at Stand 4.

To be conducted at Stand 4.

It's now 19:40. You are the Ops Chief. Suppression actions are taking place with moderate to good success on all parts of the fire. The conditions at 19:00 were as follows:

- Temperature: 83°
- RH: 25%
- Winds : Southeast to East @ 6-12 mph and you have been noticing periods of calm or no wind

At 20:05, spot fires begin to occur just over the Alder Springs Road near an abandoned old car. At 20:15 another spot fire is discovered farther down from the first spot fires. While you and the IC are discussing tactics to suppress the spots, a squad that is part of a 20-person crew from your district approaches you. They are looking for a new assignment. At this time, the second spot fire is less than an acre in size.

1. What are your instructions to the squad?

At 21:15 you realize that the spot fire is too much work for the first squad. The main fire has begun to lay down. The rest of the crew is in your vicinity.

2. What are your instructions to the rest of the crew?

## Rattlesnake Fire TDGS #5 – (Discussion)

To be handed out at Stand 4.

To be conducted at Stand 5.

You are you and it is now.

1. Describe one learning point from this event will you pass on to those you work with?

## Optional

### Rattlesnake Fire TDGS #6 – (Crisis Reaction)

To be handed out at Stand 5.

To be conducted at Stand 5 and at the Fatality Marker, with exercise ending at Stand 2 or 3.

#### At Stand 5 - the Missionary Spot Fire

You are now one of the 24 firefighters assigned to the Missionary Spot Fire. You have just sat down to lunch when you hear someone yelling from above your position. You hear Lafferty yelling for you to “get out of there, get out now!!!!” You look to the west and see a glow coming out of the bottom of the canyon near Powderhouse Turn.

- You have a decision to make. We know the outcome of the historical events, but which way would you head for safety? Why?

#### At the Fatality Marker

Cecil Hitchcock traveled 1540 feet before the blowup caught him 300 feet below Alder Springs Road. He traveled this distance in approximately 26 minutes. Hitchcock crossed the bottom of Powderhouse Canyon and was caught when his legs became tangled in wild grapevines. As you can see, the terrain was steep and brushy; factor in the fatigue and fear of what may become of you.

You may wish to travel the same route he did on that night; picture the brush in your path. Travel those 300 feet to the Alder Springs Rd. You may somewhat get a feel for what Hitchcock was faced with. If separated, meet with the rest of your group at Stand 2 or 3.

- Could he have survived had he reached the Alder Springs Road?
- How much more time might he have needed?