

# BURNOUT

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NATIONAL WILDFIRE COORDINATING GROUP (NWCG)

Risk Management Committee - Mental Health Subcommittee



## ADDRESSING BURNOUT:

- Burnout is a response to stress and frustration.
- Specifically, burnout refers to an occupational context and not to other areas of life.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) has characterized burnout as:
  - ✓ Feelings of energy depletion
  - ✓ Exhaustion
  - ✓ Increased mental distancing from one's job
  - ✓ Feelings of negativity or cynicism to one's job
  - ✓ Reduced professional efficiency



## BURNOUT VS. STRESS:

Stress is typically short-term; often it is caused by a feeling that work is out of control. Stress can be brought on by such things as long work hours, conflicts at home, or working under pressure. Typically, once the situation resolves itself or changes, stress lessens or may disappear entirely. Stress, if not resolved, can impact your physical and mental well-being.

**Burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It can take place over a long period of time. Burnout might occur if your work seems meaningless or if there is no end in sight under difficult work conditions. Burnout may happen due to a disconnect between work and life outside of work. Long fire seasons away from family, shortage of resources, gaps in key leadership positions, and communities threatened or lost can all contribute to burnout of wildland fire personnel.**

## CHALLENGES:

- How do we take days off during a busy fire season to get the rest and recovery that we need when there is a shortage of personnel? Often guilt and sense of duty drive us to return to the fireline. Commit to yourself, and your crews, that at least one extra day after each assignment will be spent in the home unit so personnel can sleep another night in their own beds.
- Do we have the support of leadership to get administrative days off and give them to our crew? Leaders need to have these discussions now, prior to the next season, and identify ways to support themselves and their crews.

For more information on mitigating burnout visit

<https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/avoiding-burnout.htm>.

## MANAGING BURNOUT:

- Delegate work. What can you delegate and to whom? Use this opportunity to develop your newer and less experienced so they can grow into leadership roles.
- Exercise regularly. It is easy to say you don't have the time or there is too much going on, but make it a practice to take even five minutes every other hour to stretch or do some jumping jacks.
- Practice meditation, mindfulness, yoga, or whatever techniques work best for you.
- Seek higher levels of care or professional support when you are unable to manage the stress yourself.

