



**TO :**

**FROM :** National Wildfire Coordinating Group

**REPLY TO :** NWCG@nifc.gov

**DATE :** 08/06/2007

**SUBJECT :** SAFETY ADVISORY : SITUATION AWARENESS BRIEFING

Wildland firefighters are strongly encouraged to conduct a "Situation Awareness Briefing" during the first hour of the operational period on Wednesday, August 8, 2007. Similar briefings related to situation awareness were recently conducted by our aviation colleagues.

We are most vulnerable to accidents and errors when the operational tempo is changing, especially when it changes quickly. Maintaining good situation awareness in spite of change in operational tempo represents a considerable challenge. Already this season wildland firefighters have experienced a number of accidents and near misses. To date, a total of 15 people have been involved in fire shelter deployments in four different states. Entrapments without shelter deployments have occurred in other locations. Most of these incidents involved fire operations in or near the urban interface coupled with a sudden change in fire behavior. In some instances, highly qualified and experienced firefighters became entrapped. Firefighters have also been killed or injured this year by vehicle and aircraft accidents, heart attacks and snags.

What is "situation awareness", how can you get it and keep it, and what are some of the barriers to achieving it? Situation awareness (SA) has been described as "knowing what is going on so you can figure out what to do" or "what you need to know not to be surprised". Many principles of safe firefighting are directed toward achieving or maintaining situation awareness. For example, the first three Standard Firefighting Orders and many of the Watch Out Situations describe either things you can do to achieve situation awareness -- "keep informed on fire weather conditions and forecasts"-- or indicators of a potential lack of situation awareness -- "uninformed on strategy, tactics and hazards".

In your SA briefing, you are encouraged to brainstorm and consider specific ways in which you can increase awareness of the hazards we face, the nature of the risks involved in wildland firefighting, and things you can do to achieve and maintain good SA. For example, consider the things that you can do to counter the barriers to good SA:

- \* Fatigue: Maintain good physical fitness and get adequate rest and nutrition
- \* Complacency: There is no such thing as a "routine fire"
- \* Fear: Confront your fears and talk about them with others
- \* Lack of communication: Follow the 5 Communication Responsibilities on page ix of the Incident Response Pocket Guide
- \* Poor crew cohesion: Build your team all season long

Please take the time to examine the Risk Management Process on page 1 of the Incident Response Pocket Guide. Additional Human Factors are listed there for your evaluation. Is your crew experience level low? Do you become easily distracted from primary tasks? What about your attitude - is it

hazardous? All of these factors impact Situation Awareness.

In your briefing, discuss the differences between this fire season and others. Is there a need to “re-calibrate” our SA for a season that is far from “normal”? What can you do to foster good SA for the rest of this fire season? Have you personally experienced some or all of the barriers to good SA? Can you raise the bar for situation awareness both individually and with your crew or team?

**Situation Awareness = SA = Staying Alive**

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