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FROM : National Wildfire Coordinating Group
REPLY TO : NWCG@nifc.gov
DATE : 04/09/2004
SUBJECT : SAFETY WARNING: New Fire Shelter Recall

In mid-March, a SAFENET was submitted describing rips occurring in two new generation fire shelters during deployment training. According to the SAFENET, the tears were in the floor material near the shake handles used to quickly deploy the shelters.

Equipment Specialists at the Missoula Technology and Development Center immediately researched the problem and confirmed that some shelters are tearing near the shake handles during deployment. Tearing occurs when shaking creates stress on the material near the handles. All tears are on the floor material. NO TEARS have been found in the shell material. Forest Service equipment specialists believe the problem is related to the stitch pattern used to attach the shake handles to the seam that joins the shelter floor and shelter shell. The stitch pattern may cause the cloth to tear more easily. During the development of the new generation shelter, shake tests did not reveal a weakness in the original design.

MTDC equipment specialists, in consultation with engineers at the University of Alberta, believe the added risk associated with the potential tearing of the shelter is very small because of the location of the tears on the underside of the shelter. However, interagency fire management leadership and specialists at MTDC are taking immediate action to fix the problem in order to ensure firefighters are provided with a quality product.

Upon notification of the SAFENET and verification of the problem in mid-March, MTDC instructed GSA to have the shelter manufacturers halt production until a remedy to the tearing could be found, and instructed GSA to put a hold on distribution of the shelters currently in stock. MTDC personnel worked with a contractor to develop a solution to the weakness in newly manufactured shelters by reinforcing the floor material adjacent to the shake handles. They also developed a retrofit solution to 'fix' the existing new generation shelters.

GSA and contractors are currently producing the new generation fire shelter design with the reinforced floor section. Fire management agencies will immediately recall existing new generation fire shelters for retrofit. Retrofitting should proceed quickly, at the rate of

approximately 3,000-5,000 per week. Fire caches will not issue the new generation shelter until it has been retrofitted or replaced with units made using the new reinforced design.

The eleven National Fire Caches will act as collection points for shelters requiring retrofit. Instructions for submitting shelters for the recall are being finalized and will be issued next week in a National Cache Memo. Firefighters are advised to wait to return any new style shelters for retrofit until the cache managers are prepared to receive them.

Firefighters should carry the old-style shelter on the fireline until either a new reinforced shelter or a retrofitted shelter is made available. **Further, firefighters carrying the older style shelters should review the training and deployment requirements.**
