



TO :
FROM : National Wildfire Coordinating Group
REPLY TO : NWCG@nifc.gov
DATE : 09/19/2002
SUBJECT : SAFETY WARNING : Fire Shelter Bag Modifications

The following information is alarming. Please assure your employees, as well as local cooperators and contractors are modifying the tear-strips on as yet un-replaced, old-style fire shelter bags. Thanks...
-ed-
Ed Hollenshead
National Wildland Fire Operations Safety Officer
USDA Forest Service

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Ed, I have a concern based on personal observations and on the results of a recent fire shelter deployment investigation. It appears that many firefighters have not modified their old style fire shelter bags by opening the tear strips half way, as required in the safety alert of May, 2001. We have ourselves observed that it is common for firefighters to carry unmodified shelter bags. We found further evidence of this during the investigation this summer of the Toolbox shelter deployment in which a 20- person contract crew deployed their shelters on a safety zone. Inspection of the shelter bags used in this incident indicated that few if any had been modified. Three showed evidence of broken strips. Had this event been more severe, these broken strips could have led to much more serious consequences if they had resulted in a delay in deployment.

Galen McCrae, Chief of Safety for CDF, reported that a recent CDF deployment was so severe and required such a rapid deployment that had there been a problem with the tear strip in that case "we would have been going to a funeral".

I suggest we issue another safety alert and in some way require supervisors to check the fire shelters bags of each of their employees immediately to ensure the bags have been properly modified. I would also recommend that contract inspectors be made aware that contract crews must also comply with the requirement to modify the old-style bags. (They should also be made aware of the Safety Alert released last winter that differentiates between the new and old style bags. The new bags with the red strip around the entire bag do not need to be modified.)

We still have the potential for severe fire behavior in the months before the new fire shelter is made available. I'd hate to see us lose someone because we didn't act on the warning signs.

Please let me know if you have any questions or want to discuss. My phone number is (406)329 -1043.

Leslie Anderson
MTDC