

National Wildfire Coordinating Group Operations and Training Committee

Date: 13 March 2019 OTC-2019-03
To: Mark Braasch, Gordon Ranger, State of Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources
From: Steve Shaw, Chair, Operations and Training Committee
Subject: 2013 S-215 Revision

This letter is in response to correspondence submitted to the NWCG Training Branch on November 30, 2018. The NWCG Incident Operations Subcommittee (IOSC) reviewed and discussed your letter. Mr. Ben Oakleaf, IOSC Chair, contacted you for additional information and discussion. The Operations and Training Committee (OTC) has been briefed on those discussions and the following recommendations from the IOSC and Mr. Oakleaf:

- NWCG recognizes that course content cannot be exact when it comes to the unique aspects of different regions and fuel types. For this reason, instructors are allowed to adapt a course to meet the needs of a local unit, as long as the course and unit objectives are met.
- The most appropriate and effective way to change the course would be involvement with the revision, which is not likely to occur until at least 2021. NWCG Training has your suggested changes on file to reference at that time. Considering the knowledge you have regarding this course, and the effort you put into this suggestion, you would be a valuable asset to the revision of S-215. For more information on the revision schedule, please contact Josh Haney at 208-387-5316 or jchaney@blm.gov.

Thank you for your interest in NWCG and commitment to improving training materials. Please feel free to contact me directly if you have any additional questions or concerns at 208-387-5722 or srshaw@blm.gov.

Respectfully,



Chair, Operations and Training Committee

Cc: Ben Oakleaf, Chair, Incident Operations Subcommittee
Josh Haney, NWCG Training Program Manager
Garth Fisher, Chair, NWCG Executive Board



November 30, 2018

Subject: 2013 S215 revision

NWCG Training Branch:

I work for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources as a forest ranger. One of my duties is training. I have been an instructor with the S215 course for roughly 15 years and the lead instructor for 5 or 6 years. I am also involved with our statewide training package that we use with our volunteer fire departments. I have some concerns about the 2013 S215 revision and associated IRPG in relation to structure triage.

First, I would like to describe our situation. In Wisconsin we have jack pine and red pine areas that will have large single day fires. These fires are wind driven, fast moving, crown fires that can burn 1000 - 15000 acres in an afternoon. This is similar to the jack pine areas of Michigan and New Jersey. Unfortunately, these areas are mixed with lakes or hunting lands and the associated structures. We work closely with our fire departments and train them in wildland and structural protection tactics. We have an organizational structure that puts the fire departments in charge of the structural protection.

My concern comes from changing the 3 triage categories into 4 categories. I also do not like how the categories are named. I believe the concept has flaws and does not work in all situations.

1. I find the concept of the 4 categories as flawed. The instructor book describes triage to divide things into 3 categories. Then the new revision changes this to four categories. The workbook and instructor guide even mentions the "old" categories. The original triage categories are valid in all situations are a great place to start when making structural protection decisions.
2. I believe the naming system of the categories is flawed. Prep and hold – Prep and leave – Rescue drive-by. Just by the names alone these are tactics not categories. "Prep and hold", these are action words. I am prepping the structure and then I am holding it safe. Even the recue drive-by implies some type of action. The instructor guide states that the "instructor must make sure there is no confusion between triage categories and structural protection tactical actions". How can this be done if the first 3 tactical actions in the next chapter have the same name as 3 of the 4 triage categories?

Many years ago, our main tactic for structure protection was getting out in front of the fire and prepping structures and either leaving or staying. Because of the fast moving nature of some of our fires we moved to the concept of "in the black" or in national terms "fire front following". Jack Cohen's work helped us go down this path. We have always taught the 3 triage categories of; stand alone, needs help, and hopeless. These names have changed slightly over the years or among agencies but have the same meaning. This system works when we are working out in front of the fire or working in the black. This is the way a category like this should work. The category should be independent of the tactic.

The new category system does not work this way. How do tactics like Bump and Run, Fire Front Following, and Mop-up and Patrol work with the categories? If I am doing a fire front following tactic and I put out a burning deck after the fire front has passed, what is the triage category? In the 3-category system it is a "needs help". In the 4-category system there does not seem to be a category. I am not prepping, driving-by, or letting it stand alone.

I like the concept as a decision matrix. It can help firefighters ask some questions and use the dichotomous tree to decide on a course of action. This can work very well especially if you are working in front of the fire. I would suggest that it be moved to Unit 6 and used to help decide on tactics working in front of the fire. Another suggestion would be to divide the tactics in to 3 sections based on where you are in the fire. Are you in front, along with, or behind the fire front?

I hope my comments and concerns are clear and understandable. I very much believe we should go back to the original 3 triage categories because of the issues described above.

These comments are unrelated to the triage system. One of my instructors would like to see some better descriptions or diagrams for the tactics. He thought this may help teach the concepts.

Feel free to contact me. I am willing to clarify or discuss these issues further.

Sincerely



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