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FROM : National Wildfire Coordinating Group
REPLY TO : NWCG@nifc.gov
DATE : 04/13/2001
SUBJECT : SAFETY ADVISORY : Fire Shelter Packaging Defect

Federal firefighting agencies are responding to a defect discovered in the packaging of fire shelters by recalling 44,000 affected shelters currently in use and storage throughout the country.

The issue is focused on the red pull-tabs that open the clear plastic case covering some of the fire shelters manufactured under General Services Administration (GSA) Contract GS-07F-J0091. These tabs tend to break off before unzipping the clear plastic case that encloses the fire shelters.

Alice Forbes, USDA Forest Service Branch Chief for Chemicals and Equipment stressed that the recall addresses the pull-tabs on the packaging only, and not the fire shelter. It must be emphasized that the shelters will still perform as intended for the firefighter. The tabs breaking on the outer case could force the firefighter to remove his or her gloves in order to attempt to get the cover off without the tabs. This is cumbersome, and adds precious seconds, as well as anxiety to an already tense situation. We strive always to fight fire safely so that no one will ever need to use a fire shelter, but history has taught us differently.

The shelters themselves are manufactured according to specification and will simply be re-worked with a new outer case, added Leslie Anderson, Fire Shelter Development Project Leader with the Missoula Technology and Development Center.

Any agency having shelters manufactured under General Services Administration (GSA) Contract GS-07F-J0091 is asked to collect the shelters by May 4, 2001, and return them to their nearest Geographic Area Coordination Center/National Interagency Support Cache where they will be inventoried. GSA will then issue a credit to the unit for the shelters. GSA is working on a contract to get the shelter packaging re-worked as rapidly as possible to make them available for the coming fire season. Current supplies of fire shelters in the cache system and GSA can meet the immediate needs of the agencies.
