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FROM : National Wildfire Coordinating Group

REPLY TO : NWCG@nifc.gov

DATE : 07/11/2002

SUBJECT : SAFETY ADVISORY : Price Canyon Entrapment 72 Hr Report

Enclosed is the 72 hr report from the entrapment at the Price Canyon Fire in Utah, please insure it gets wide distribution within your fire organization . Additionally, please note the findings as they pertain to adjusting strategy and tactics in extreme fire conditions .

July 6, 2002

**Expanded (72-hour) Briefing
Price Canyon Wildfire, Price Field Office
Incident #: Q560, June 30, 2002**

The Following Information is Preliminary and Subject to Change

Narrative:

A railroad train ignited the Price Canyon Wildfire on June 30, 2002. The fire-start was located in a valley bottom near Highway 6 eleven miles west of Price, Utah. The fire progressed upslope, burning onto the steep slopes of Sulphur Canyon. At 1430, Moab Interagency Dispatch ordered smokejumpers to initial attack the fire. Around 1630 hours, eight smokejumpers jumped the fire. Initial attack engines were already on the fire. At this time, the fire's size was estimated to be 300-500 acres.

The jumpers landed on a sagebrush/grass plateau above the fire and then burned out an area to secure their jump gear and to create a safety zone. They then proceeded to use an indirect method of fire attack, burning out from existing roads and two-track trails. This initial fire operation was approximately one half mile from the main fire in Sulphur Canyon.

At approximately 1900 hours, five of the eight smokejumpers experienced a strong blast of hot air and softball sized fire debris and embers. They estimated eye-level wind speeds at over 50 miles per hour. Three of the jumpers ran north away from the fire area along a two-track road through unburned sagebrush/grass fuels toward a paved highway. Two other jumpers initially ran toward the east along a two-track road. After the initial blast subsided, they turned around and went back to the previously burned out safety zone and deployed their fire shelters.

The jumpers said they were surprised by the blast of hot air and embers and felt their lives were threatened.

The entrapments were not immediately reported.

None of the smokejumpers was injured.

Preliminary Findings

- X This fire entrapment was a life-threatening event.
- X There wasn't a lookout posted who could see and communicate to initial attack crews the exact location and behavior of the main fire.

- X The risk management process outlined in the Incident Response Pocket Guide was not completely followed.

Findings the Team Feels Need To Be Passed On To the Wildland Firefighting Community

- X Indirect attack strategies during extreme fire danger conditions are high-risk operations and must be carefully planned and coordinated.
- X Interactions of multiple wildfire smoke columns, or with smoke columns produced by burnout operations on a wildfire, must be closely monitored, for one smoke column can easily be drawn into another one, depending on the individual column's intensity.
- X In the plateau-canyon topography of Southern Utah during periods of extreme fire danger, problem fire behavior, eg. smoke column rise and collapse, fire whirls, spotting — can be expected as the fires make strong upslope runs out of the canyons and begin to cross the plateaus. Close proximity to such behavior represents extreme danger.
- X Lookouts must be positioned to view the whole wildfire area and be in a position to instantly communicate observations concerning fire behavior and safety to firefighters.
- X All fire entrapments must be immediately reported to fire overhead.

Glenn A. Carpenter
Serious Accident Investigation Team Leader