

Section 7030
(October 2002)

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VMP OPERATIONS

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(October 2002)

VMP PROGRAM GOALS (Board of Forestry and Fire Protection)

The goal of the *Vegetation Management Program* (VMP) is to reduce the chance of large, damaging wildfires by reducing fire hazards on wildlands in California. Encouraging the best 'mix' of natural resource benefits from these lands, consistent with environmental protection and landowner objectives, is the Department's intent. This includes the three broad purposes, which encompass most Vegetation Management objectives:

- Reduction of conflagration fires.
- Optimization of soil and water productivity.
- Protection and improvement of intrinsic ecosystem values.

PLANNING THE BURN

7030.1

(October 2002)

CDF's prescribed burns under the VMP are conducted for many reasons. Most burns have hazard-reduction as a major objective coordinated under the Unit Fire Plan. However, many burns have important secondary objectives that could include:

- Fuel Reduction
- Community Defensible Space
- Range Improvement
- Weed Management
- Wildlife Habitat Enhancement

VMP projects use various techniques to accomplish program goals:

- Broadcast Burning
- Mosaic Burning in Chaparral
- Pile & Burn using Hand Crews
- Chipping and Commercial Biomass

VMP projects are conducted on a cost-share basis with private landowners. (Federal lands can be incorporated if the joint project promotes mutual objectives). During the planning process, CDF and landowners sign a standard agreement for prescribed burning (rm-75). Project details are explained in the prescribed burn plan and are regulated by law and program constraints. The burn plan also incorporates input from review agencies such as the Department of Fish and Game, Air Resources Control Board, and Regional Water Quality Control Board.

The unit VMP coordinator consults with battalion personnel during the planning phase. Advice from the battalion chief and captains is essential for success. These employees are the ones who will be

conducting the project. The VMP coordinator is responsible for planning and documentation once a project has been proposed. Coordination will include identifying acceptable projects, contacting landowners, and developing or supporting the following steps on each project:

PLANNING CHECKLIST

7030.2

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1. Application Information
 - Project Name and number
 - List of cooperators
 - Map and description of proposed treatment. Include APN #'s and maps.
 - CDF and applicant loosely agree on cooperator's contribution for the project.
2. Draft Burn Plan prepared
3. Environmental Review - Agency Letters:
 - Department of Fish and Game or relevant federal agency
 - Local Native American Tribal Groups
 - Water Quality Control Board
 - Local Air Pollution Control District
 - Information Center Archaeological Records Search
 - Natural Diversity Data Base Report
 - Others: _____
4. Project Burn Plan finalized
5. Cost Summary prepared
6. Environmental Checklist finalized
7. Archeological Report completed
8. Rx Burn Agreement and Project Plan Signatures
9. Project Approval (Region or Sacramento)
10. Air Pollution Permit
11. Complete pre-burn treatment as necessary:
12. Complete Incident Action Plan
13. Notify Region of proposed burn date:
14. Public notifications as per IAP
15. Site-specific weather forecast:
16. Go/No Go Checklist; Implement Project:
17. Completion report to Region:

The above order is more or less the flow of project development through completion.

The handbook presents the VMP process and forms. In addition, the handbook provides guidelines on how and where to apply the VMP process, CEQA compliance, project documentation, and descriptions of Unit, Region, and Headquarters functions. Reference: VMP Handbook & Field Guide (Approved June 2001)

WEATHER
(October 2002)

7030.3

Most burns need a site-specific weather forecast to ensure that the project is conducted within prescribed weather limits. The IC should contact the forecaster 2-7 days ahead of the burn to request the necessary forecast. He/she will need to provide on-site weather readings from a belt weather kit or may be requested to set up a portable remote automatic weather station (P-RAWS) or provide other local information to support a dependable forecast.

BRIEFING
(October 2002)

7030.4

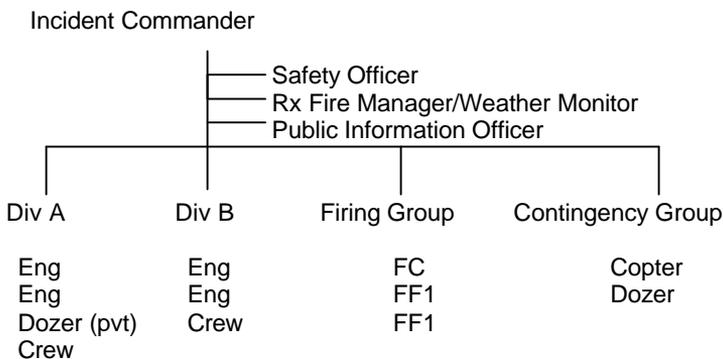
The IC should present a pre-ignition briefing for all crews assigned to the project. He/she should cover the burn objectives, ignition pattern, trigger points and all issues normally addressed in a standard wildland fire briefing.

INCIDENT STAFFING
(October 2002)

7030.5

Some VMP projects are more complex than others. Simple burns may involve only a single hand crew or engine. Other projects could require multiple engines, aircraft, private and agency dozers, numerous overhead and provides opportunity for media interaction and public education.

The key distinction between VMP and wildfire is that pre-planning a prescribed burn reduces uncertainty and makes the overall VMP assignment less complex. In some cases, specialized expertise in firing, weather modeling or fire behavior is needed. It is CDF's policy to use ICS in conducting prescribed fires. A simple prescribed burn operational structure is shown below.



LANDOWNER (PRIVATE) PARTICIPATION

7030.6

(October 2002)

As a California cost-share program, VMP requires financial participation by the landowner. Pre and post burn participation from landowners is encouraged if it is within their capabilities. Landowners are sometimes involved in holding, firing, mopup or patrol with direction from CDF. Although non-CDF personnel supply their own equipment, PPE and liability insurance, it is prudent for CDF to provide informal oversight and look out for obvious safety concerns.

VMP TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

7030.7

(October 2002)

VMP projects can provide a training opportunity for Unit personnel. The IC should discuss the potential for useful assignments with the Unit Training Officer and trainee. Both formal and informal training opportunities may exist. Trainees can be assigned to “shadow” another qualified individual or they may have direct line responsibility if suitable personnel are available to monitor progress or take over if necessary.

In addition to CDF-specific and general ICS fire courses that qualify CDF employees to conduct prescribed fires, the following Rx fire courses can be helpful. In complex prescribed burns, such training could be essential. The Unit Chief is responsible to advise when specialized training is needed on the fireground. Prescribed fire coursework is described in the NWCG Wildland and Prescribed Fire Qualification System Guide PMS 310-1. Although not obligatory for CDF, this guide provides for specialized training on complex projects. The NWCG Prescribed Fire Complexity guide PMS-424, NFES-2474 provides information in assessing the difficulty of a project.

- Prescribed Fire IC Rx-300
- Smoke Management Rx-410/Rx-450/Rx-95
- Advanced Fire Behavior Calculations S-490
- California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)
- Firing Methods & Procedures CDF-234/S-234
- Weather Monitoring / Fire Effects

PRESCRIBED FIRE MANAGER

7030.8

(October 2002)

This position is generally the Unit VMP Coordinator. He/she may have direct operational responsibility working as IC, Firing Group Supervisor or Division Supervisor or may be an advisor to the IC as a Technical Specialist Planner or Fire Behavior Technical Specialist Monitor.

FIRE EFFECTS

7030.9

(October 2002)

The objective of prescribed burning is to create a specific fire impact on vegetation. A particular fire may be set to consume a class of fuels (such as 1-hour and 10- hour fuels) but designed to keep unburned the large diameter logs and live fuels. Some projects are intended to burn brush and underburn large trees with a minimum of damage. The intent of each project is laid out in the Burn Plan. The IC must design a plan of ignition that will achieve the objective.

CONTINGENCY PLAN

7030.10

(October 2002)

Contingency plans are an addendum to the IAP that should be prepared on complex burns within the declared fire season. If an escape occurs, a prepared contingency plan has value because it speeds expansion of the organization. A contingency plan typically identifies potential control locations, values at risk, trigger points, and resource needs.

1. Potential Exposures. Based on the project's neighborhood, surrounding fuels and topography, determine what exposures may be impacted by uncontrolled fire growth outside of the project area. Exposures include improvements, archaeological sites, critical habitat, modified suppression areas, etc.
2. Secondary containment: Surrounding fuels and topography may indicate appropriate secondary containment strategies if the burn were to escape primary control lines. Consider resource needs, access issues for crews, equipment and aircraft, anticipated response times of additional resources, etc.

PRESCRIBED BURN CHECKLIST

7030.11

(October 2002)

Prior to ignition, the IC must confirm that the Region Duty Chief has been notified and then complete the VMP Go/No Go Checklist (see [VMP Go-No Go Checklist](#) and [VMP Prescribed Burn Planning \(Form 2\)](#)). These forms document that the following areas have been addressed:

- _____ Approval Process
- _____ Notifications
- _____ IAP Prepared
- _____ Resources Available
- _____ Weather in Prescription

[VMP Handbook 6/16/01 p57-58]

**DECLARING AN ESCAPED FIRE
OR REINFORCED ACTION**
(October 2002)

7030.12

When the potential exists for the fire to exceed desired burning characteristics and/or its boundaries, additional resources may be justified to reduce risk and complete the project with a safety margin. This decision to order resources is based on the IC's experience and knowledge of fire behavior, weather conditions, environmental conditions, and available resources.

Reinforced Actions (Escapes). PRC 4104 defines an "uncontrolled fire": "The term 'uncontrolled fire', as used in this division, means any fire which threatens to destroy life, property, or resources, and either: 1) is unattended by any person; 2) is attended by persons unable to prevent its unrestricted spread; or 3) is burning with such velocity or intensity that it could not be readily controlled with those ordinary tools available to private persons at the fire scene."

A prescribed fire that burns outside of control lines is not necessarily an uncontrolled fire or an escape. Circumstances such as spots over the line, flare-ups, and slopovers that can be readily controlled with holding crews on hand, do not constitute an uncontrolled fire or an escape. They are the reason that holding resources are planned.

The IC **may** declare a prescribed fire to be an uncontrolled fire at any time. The following criteria will be considered:

1. The fire burns outside the area planned for burning, into an area where reinforced suppression action is required. This may be another ownership, a vegetation type that may be damaged by fire on the same ownership, or other circumstances that call for reinforced action beyond the scope of the project budget. Fire effects that substantially exceed the limits contained in the VMP contract and will have an adverse impact on the physical conditions within the area, including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historical or aesthetic significance shall be considered in this determination.
2. When the fire behavior is determined to be such that existing holding resources will not be adequate to maintain or regain control. This standard gives the IC the latitude to act before the fire actually begins to do damage based on the expected fire behavior/control problems. Fires that develop sufficient fire behavior that will have a "significant effect on the environment" shall be considered "escaped fire".

3. When the fire behavior is determined to be such that it does not meet the land management objectives, and/or when weather exceeds prescribed limits. This standard gives the IC the option of beginning reinforced suppression action in response to actual or predicted weather or fire behavior that exceeds planned limits.

The IC **will** declare a prescribed fire to be an uncontrolled fire (escaped fire) when:

1. Available Unit resources and readily available hand crews cannot maintain control of the fire. Regional forces (air tankers, and crews, out-of-county resources, helicopters) are ordered to suppress and/or contain prescribed fire activity. (In those areas along Unit boundaries where the closest resources to the incident would be an out-of-unit resource, use of these closest resources would not mandate a declaration of an escape).
2. A prescribed fire burns outside the project boundary and is on lands not covered by contracts and appropriate VMP documents. All activity that leads to the burning of another's land or property is an "escaped fire".

If for any of these reasons, or a combination of them, the IC declares a prescribed fire to be an uncontrolled fire, that person will remain as the IC until relieved by a higher authority.

REPORTING REINFORCED ACTIONS: Region Office Duty Chief will be notified immediately that an "escaped or uncontrolled" fire has occurred.

MEDIA RELATIONS: Within the context of reinforced actions or escape fire scenarios, all requests for information from the public or media shall be referred to the Unit Chief or his/her designated media contact.

VMP CONTROL, MOPUP AND PATROL **7030.13**
(October 2002)

A fire can be declared controlled when it has been maintained within firelines during a significant post-containment period. This period varies depending on the vegetation type and holdover potential. On a simple grass burn, it could be as short as an hour or two after containment. On an oak-woodland project, supervision might extend through the next day. A timberland burn would require direct supervision even longer. During the control period, mopup will continue. After being declared controlled, the control effort may continue. As is the case of the final patrol stage of a wildfire, CDF has the option of transferring patrol duties to the landowner if he is able and willing to take on the responsibility. The IC should evaluate the

risk and consequences of an escape from a State-led prescribed burn when making this decision. In general, direct CDF supervision of a prescribed burn should last at least as long as would occur on a comparable wildfire.

[\(see next section\)](#)

[\(see HB Table of Contents\)](#)

[\(see Forms or Forms Samples\)](#)