

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE – WEATHER FORECASTING

7852

(July 2015)

The National Weather Service (NWS) provides CAL FIRE fire weather forecasts from meteorologists positioned at local field offices known as Weather Forecast Offices (WFO). The WFO works in coordination with Predictive Service Unit meteorologists located at the Geographical Area Coordination Centers. The WFOs provide CAL FIRE local Fire Weather Planning forecasts via use of Emergency Command Center Dispatch Areas (ECCDA) or Fire Weather Forecast Zones (FWZ). Key products also include Fire Weather Watches and Red Flag Warnings, issued when critical fire weather is predicted and/or occurring. WFO meteorologists also provide Incident Meteorology (IMET) services on larger and complex incidents.

EMERGENCY COMMAND CENTER DISPATCH AREA FORECAST

7852.1

(July 2015)

[\(See National Weather Service - California Fire Weather\)](#)

The Emergency Command Center Dispatch Area (ECCDA) Forecasts are daily fire weather forecasts provided for each Interagency Dispatch Center by the National Weather Service Weather Forecast Offices (WFO). This forecast is the official forecast to be used for field fire weather distribution by the Emergency Command Centers. Emergency Command Centers distribute this forecast information as per [HB 8100p210 – Fire Weather Forecasts](#).

FIRE WEATHER PLANNING FORECAST

7852.2

(July 2015)

[\(See National Weather Service - California Fire Weather\)](#)

The Fire Weather Planning Forecasts are general forecasts developed for each Fire Weather Zone to use for more specific operational planning purposes (prescribed fire, incident planning, etc).

FIRE WEATHER WATCH AND RED FLAG WARNING 7852.3 (July 2015)

[\(See Policy 9010-9013 – Red Flag Alert Program\)](#)

[\(See HB 8100p212 – Fire Weather Watch and Red Flag Warning\)](#)

[\(See National Weather Service - California Fire Weather\)](#)

The Red Flag program is a fire prevention and fire preparedness tool that is recognized nationally and used by CAL FIRE to increase preparedness, inform firefighting personnel, inform cooperating agencies, and inform the public of critical fire weather conditions. When fuel conditions, determined by the wildland fire agencies, warrant the National Weather Service, Weather Forecast Office (WFO) notify the fire agencies that weather conditions support critical fire danger and/or dangerous fire behavior. The critical fire weather conditions are highlighted using Fire Weather Watches or Red Flag Warnings.

Fire Weather Watch

A Fire Weather Watch is used to alert agencies to the high potential for development of a Red Flag Warning event in the 18-96 hour time frame. The Watch may be issued for all or selected portions of a fire weather zone or zones. Fire Weather Watch time frame criteria vary from one WFO to another but is standard within each WFO. [\(See National Weather Service Instruction 10-401\)](#). The overall intent of a Fire Weather Watch is to alert users at least a day in advance for purposes of resource allocation and firefighter safety. Notification of Fire Weather Watches shall be headlined in all affected forecasts. All WFO fire weather web pages shall highlight any Fire Weather Watch issuances.

Red Flag Warning

A Red Flag Warning is used to inform agencies of the impending or occurring extreme fire weather conditions. A Red Flag Warning is issued when there is high confidence that the criteria will be met within the next 48 hours or less or criteria is already being met. [\(See National Weather Service Instruction 10-401\)](#) and [\(See the current California Fire Weather Annual Operating Plan \(California AOP\)\)](#). Longer lead times are allowed when confidence is very high or the fire danger situation is critical. Red Flag criteria are determined by coordination between WFO personnel and wildland fire agencies within the WFO fire weather service area. Each WFO or group of WFOs should have their criteria well-documented in the California AOP. Red Flag Warning criteria may vary from one WFO to another but is standard within each WFO. If the criteria of Red Flag conditions are met at a specific incident, Incident Meteorologists (IMETs) have the option to issue a localized Red Flag Warning. Notification of all Red Flag Warnings shall be headlined in affected forecasts. All WFO fire weather web pages shall highlight any Red Flag Warning issuances.

[\(see Next Section\)](#)

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

[\(see Forms and Form Samples\)](#)