



**October 8, 2019**

**Mop-Up on Wildfires**

## What is Mop-Up?

Extreme drought and dry weather make wildfires much more complex and difficult to control. Perhaps the more obvious reason is that the dry conditions make fuels burn much hotter and faster, which helps the fire to spread much more quickly, creating much larger fires. But wildfires during periods of extreme drought are also made more complex during “mop-up” – the inevitable aftermath of every wildfire response.

Mop-up is the hard, dirty, slow and tedious work of looking for smokes or hot spots in what otherwise looks like a cold area. Firefighters extinguish any remaining flames, remove burning material near the control lines, and stir, drown, stir any hot areas that are still smoking. Snags or trees may need to be taken down because of fire inside their trunk. Logs may need to be trenched to prevent rolling, particularly rolling outside the fire control lines.

This work starts as soon as possible along the back or cooler sides of an active fire and generally is done all the way around a fire’s perimeter edge. The fire is not out completely until mop-up is done and the fire’s outer edge is cold to the touch. While complete extinguishment of all material burning “within the black” may be impractical on large fires, firefighters should extinguish all smoldering material within a specified distance from the control line.

Mop-up can last for days after the last active flame along the control line has been extinguished. Stumps near the line can burn for a long time. Fire can smolder in the root system and come to the surface on the green side of the control line, starting another fire. A single, undetected, burning ember could rekindle the fire and wipe out all your previous firefighting efforts.

Depending on the size and amount of fuel still smoldering, firefighters may need to patrol the fire for days or even weeks until the fire edge is completely out. This additional patrolling puts a strain on our firefighter resources during a busy fire season. All of this combined makes mop-up a more complex element of wildland firefighting during periods of drought and dry weather.