

Policy and Procedure 4-2 Emergency Response Assignments

Issued By:	Robert W. Farrell, State Forester
Effective Date:	October 01, 2018
Codes/Mandates:	Code of Virginia §10.1-1149 Southeastern Interstate Forest Fire Protection Compact and §10.1-1150 Middle Atlantic Interstate Forest Fire Protection Compact
References:	Southeastern Interstate Forest Fire Protection Compact Middle Atlantic Interstate Forest Fire Protection Compact
Forms:	N/A

CONTENTS

PURPOSE	1
POLICY	1
DEFINITIONS	1
PROCEDURES	2
Types of Emergency Responses	2
Agency-Related Responses.....	2
Compact-Related Responses	2
Non-Agency/Non-Compact Responses.....	2
<i>Compensation</i>	2
<i>Participation</i>	2
General Guidelines	3
Travel	3
Operational Periods	3
Incident Safety Officers	4
Other Agency Assignments	4
Temporary Assignment	4
Equipment Use.....	4
Hazardous Materials (HAZMAT)	4
AUTHORITY	4
INTERPRETATION	4
APPROVAL	5

PURPOSE

Provide procedures for the safe mobilization of resources for emergency response operations.

POLICY

The VDOF will provide efficient and effective emergency response to limit the potential damage to life and property while ensuring that the health and safety of all response personnel remains the highest priority in any response. The VDOF also supports the continued professional development of its employees through voluntary participation in emergency incident assignments provided that such participation does not detract from the agency’s ability to meet its basic duties and responsibilities.

DEFINITIONS

“Agency” and “VDOF” means the Virginia Department of Forestry.

“Commonwealth” means the Commonwealth of Virginia.

PROCEDURES

Types of Emergency Responses

Agency-Related Responses

These include mandatory assignments to incidents over which the agency has primary statutory responsibility or in which the agency participates in response to natural or manmade disasters. Compensation will be handled through the agency in accordance with established policies and procedures.

Compact-Related Responses

VDOF is a member of the Southeastern Interstate Forest Fire Protection Compact and the Middle Atlantic Interstate Forest Fire Protection Compact. As such, agency personnel may be asked to respond to emergencies anywhere in the geographical areas covered by the compacts. Rather than making mandatory staff assignments to meet its obligations under the terms of the compacts, the agency's preferred initial approach is to solicit volunteers. Compensation will be handled through the agency in accordance with established policies and procedure – the same as agency-related responses.

Non-Agency/Non-Compact Responses

These are generally handled through the Virginia Interagency Coordination Center (VICC) and may involve requests for assistance with wildfires on federal land or as a result of large-scale natural or manmade disasters. Response to these incidents is voluntary in nature but requires prior supervisor authorization.

Compensation

Responding employees may elect to be temporarily detailed to these assignments while continuing to have their hours tracked and counted as hours worked for VDOF. In this case, compensation will be handled by VDOF in accordance with established policies and procedures.

Alternatively, responding employees may elect to take personal leave from VDOF and enter into a separate temporary employment agreement with the agency receiving the assistance, in which case, compensation will be handled according to the policies and procedures of the receiving agency.

Participation

Participation in non-agency/non-compact assignments will not be approved during Virginia's fire seasons, which is from February 15 through April 30 and from October 15 through November 30, respectively. Exemptions may be granted only by the state forester, deputy state forester, chief of administration or the director of fire and emergency response if the weather and conditions on the ground are such that the risk of wildfires throughout the state is low and is expected to remain low for the duration of the employee's assignment.

Participation in non-agency/non-compact assignments provides opportunities for enhanced training, educational advancement and additional compensation. However, such assignments usually require extended absences from the job site creating a situation that may place a burden on the work group whose members must take on additional duties to cover for the responding employee.

Consequently, in the interest of fulfilling our mission while promoting reasonable access to developmental opportunities, employees may:

- ◆ Participate in only one (1) non-agency/non-compact assignment per 12-month period if they choose not to use personal leave and elect instead to continue to have their time tracked and counted as hours worked for VDOF. Prior supervisor approval is required.
- ◆ Participate in an indeterminate number of non-agency/non-compact assignments if they elect to use personal leave and enter into a separate temporary employment agreement with the receiving agency for their compensation. Prior leave approval is required.

General Guidelines

Despite our finest intentions to provide the best possible service to the people and to the fire departments in the state of Virginia, we must retain our perspective and our priorities. The safety and health of our employees is just as important as the safety of other Virginians, and is more important than the potential loss of structures, property and wildlife.

While implementation of these guidelines may involve the use of additional personnel, other state resources and/or result in higher fire suppression costs, they have been developed for the sole purpose of ensuring the safety and health of all Virginia Department of Forestry employees deployed on incidents around the state. They apply not only to line firefighters, but to overhead and support personnel as well. Fatigue is just as critical a factor in the performance of those in key decision-making positions as it is to firefighters on the line.

Travel

All personnel who have been without sleep for 24 hours are prohibited from travel. This includes all previous work hours, travel hours and off-duty hours. **Personnel who have been without sleep for 24 hours must sleep a minimum of six hours before attempting travel to another fire or to return home.**

- ◆ **Overhead Teams** – The incident commander has the authority to make decisions related to travel. This authority may be delegated to the safety officer.
- ◆ **Strike Teams** – In situations where there is no incident commander, the designated strike team leader has the authority to make decisions concerning travel, including travel routes, rest periods, sleeping quarters, etc.
- ◆ **Convoys** – When personnel and equipment are dispatched as a convoy, the director of fire and emergency response or designated representative, will appoint a leader. This leader will be identified to all personnel in the convoy. The leader will brief all convoy personnel. The leader has the authority to make all decisions concerning travel.

Travel should generally be limited to no more than 12 hours per day. This requirement may be extended on a case by case basis only under the following conditions:

- ◆ There is more than one driver, so that **no one driver will exceed eight hours of driving per day.**
- ◆ Reasons for the time extension are documented and justifiable. Reasons may include proximity to final destination, adequate rest available for personnel who are not driving, an early start in the day, etc.
- ◆ If long distances of travel are required to reach an incident, every effort should be made to provide a minimum of eight hours of rest for personnel before reporting to fireline duty.

In no case should total travel time exceed 16 hours per day.

Every employee should be familiar with the Virginia Department of Forestry policy regarding safety and travel. Situations resulting in violations of these policies must be brought immediately to the attention of the safety officer, the incident commander or supervisory personnel.

Operational Periods

- ◆ **A 2:1 work/rest ratio will be followed.**
- ◆ **Actual work shifts should be limited to 12 hours**, not counting travel time to and from the fireline, briefings, meals, etc. **A typical shift should allow for a maximum of 16 hours on duty and eight hours off.** Under extreme circumstances, such as initial attack, life threatening conditions, threatened structures, endangered species, etc., the incident commander may authorize an initial 24-hour work shift.
- ◆ Mandatory one day (24 hours) off after working 14 consecutive days or two days off in 21 days, the two days do not have to be consecutive.
- ◆ Personnel on duty for less than 12 hours before demobilizing to a second incident may travel to the second incident without prior rest provided that:
 - Travel time to the second incident is less than six hours, and

- A minimum of six hours of rest will be provided upon arrival to the second incident before reporting to the fireline.

Incident Safety Officers

A designated safety officer should be appointed to each Incident Management Team that is deployed.

Unless otherwise delegated to a safety officer, the incident commander will make all decisions related to travel. In situations where there is no incident commander, the designated strike team leader or convoy leader has the authority to make all decisions concerning travel.

Every employee should be familiar with the Virginia Department of Forestry policies and procedures regarding safety and travel. Situations resulting in violations of these policy and procedures must be brought immediately to the attention of the safety officer, the incident commander or supervisory personnel.

Other Agency Assignments

All Virginia Department of Forestry personnel temporarily assigned to other agencies will comply with the receiving agency's safety requirements, to the extent that those requirements do not conflict with Virginia Department of Forestry safety minimums.

Temporary Assignment

All employees are subject to temporary assignment to any part of the Commonwealth for duty for forest fire suppression activities, natural disasters and other emergencies as declared by the state forester. Therefore, personnel cannot be obligated for other activities, such as being a member of local emergency planning teams except as assigned by the state forester.

Equipment Use

VDOF equipment may be available for assignment to specific transportation needs in a serious emergency or in connection with county Emergency Operation Plans. Vehicles used for such purposes will be subject to recall should a VDOF need arise.

Hazardous Materials (HAZMAT)

Handling incidents of hazardous and toxic material fires and spills require specialized training and equipment to ensure everyone's safety.

It is integral to understand that VDOF does not possess a specialized or trained team that can respond to a HAZMAT incident during normal or emergency response assignments. Therefore, leaders at all levels of the agency must ensure employees within their command and control are up-to-date on their "HazCom: What You Need to Know" new employee awareness training, which is essential for identifying incidents that merit specialized handle and care.

Regional leaders must ensure that employees selected for emergency response assignments understand the HAZMAT incident communication and response protocols to ensure VDOF personnel will not put themselves in jeopardy beyond their training or expose themselves to hazardous materials for which they do not have protective clothing.

VDOF equipment may be turned over to the incident commander for use, if warranted, at the site.

AUTHORITY

This policy and procedure is issued by the Virginia state forester.

INTERPRETATION

The director of fire and emergency response and the deputy state forester are responsible for the interpretation of this policy and procedure within their respective areas of responsibility.

APPROVAL

I certify that this policy and procedure is approved and ready for publication.

John Miller

Director of Fire and Emergency Response Name (Print)

Director of Fire and Emergency Response Signature

Ed Zimmer

Deputy State Forester Name (Print)

Deputy State Forester Signature