

LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT BRUSHFIRE RESPONSE GUIDE - 2014

BACKGROUND

The success of the Los Angeles Police Department (Department) in specialized operations and emergency management is dependent on comprehensive planning and effective, meaningful training. Planning for unusual occurrences should begin as early as possible to allow sufficient time to consider all options. Training should be directed toward preparation and operational readiness, at both the field and command levels.

The onset of the fire season requires that Department personnel examine policy and procedures for response to brushfires. Area commanding officers should identify locations that may be impacted by brushfires and develop incident action plans specific to those locations.

The following is provided as a general guide in the management of brushfire emergencies.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Department is to protect lives and to restore conditions to normal as rapidly and efficiently as possible. The objectives that must be addressed to accomplish this mission are listed in priority order as follows:

- Protect lives
- Restore and maintain order
- Protect vital facilities
- Arrest law violators
- Protect property

RED FLAG CONDITION AND RED FLAG ALERT

A Red Flag Condition (RFC) and a Red Flag Alert (RFA) are issued by the City and/or County Fire Departments to describe periods of elevated danger for brushfires. Factors that are considered in the issuance of a condition or alert include temperature, humidity, and wind speed. It is possible for a condition or alert to be issued for County areas and not include portions of the City. In the event of a media announced RFA, the Watch Commander, Real-Time Analysis and Critical Response Division (RACR)/ Department Operations Center (DOC), shall contact the Floor Captain, Metropolitan Fire Communications, Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD), at (213) 576-8920, or contact LAFD dispatch at (213) 847-5340 to verify whether the alert includes the City.

RED FLAG CONDITION

An RFC is issued by LAFD when the relative humidity is below 15% and winds exceed 25 miles per hour. The LAFD deploys additional resources to wildfire prone areas during RFC periods.

The LAFD had its local Station Commanders conduct a survey of their districts in order to identify the areas that would create a problem for community members while evacuating and for fire companies entering the area during a fast moving brushfire. Station Commanders were directed to identify narrow roads, tight curves, and critical intersections that would create choke points. The areas identified were reviewed by the LAFD and Department of Transportation

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(DOT) to make sure the criteria for posting was correct. Once identified, these areas were posted by DOT during an RFC.

RED FLAG ALERT

An RFA is the public notice that is issued by the LAFD to notify community members that an RFC exists in the right combination to cause the City to take certain protective actions. An RFA indicates a serious threat of imminent brushfires. In the event of an RFA the following Department actions will be taken:

- Upon notification by the LAFD of an RFA, the RACR/DOC shall ensure that an RFA broadcast is made through Communications Division.
- All geographic Areas with an urban/wildland interface shall implement the RFC Single Purpose Operations Plan contained in their Standing Plans.
- The DOC shall be activated at Level I and the Department placed on Modified Tactical Alert.
- The DOC shall specifically notify all Traffic Divisions of potential need for Motor Strike Teams (MST) and determine the number of MST available for deployment in the event of a brushfire.

OFFICER SAFETY

All officers should be aware of the dangers involved in brushfires. A person trapped by a fast-moving brushfire can seldom run fast enough to escape on-rushing flames. Knowledge of brushfire survival techniques may alleviate injury to officers working in close proximity to the fire.

- Know where the fire is at all times and monitor the radio.
- Keep escape routes in mind and make them known to others.
- Park vehicles where they will not obstruct others.
- Close windows and park the vehicle directed toward the escape route.
- Keep clear of all electrical power lines.
- Wear helmet and face shield in areas of heavy smoke and flying debris.

Supervisors should be aware of the locations of their officers at all times. Interior patrols of extremely hazardous areas (hilltops) should be avoided. Selection of experienced officers with tactical knowledge should be a consideration in designating interior patrols.

If an officer becomes trapped on foot in the fire zone, he or she should not attempt to outrun the fire. The officer should take shelter, or if firefighters are in the vicinity, be guided by their actions. If forced to take shelter inside a residence, close all the doors and windows. Wait out the fire in a room in the center of the house with the doors closed. After the bulk of the heat from the brushfire has passed, exit the structure as soon as practical. Officers trapped in the open should avoid hillsides. The heat is hottest at the top. Smoke and heat kills. In windy conditions, flames can travel around hillsides at alarming speed.

When driving in a fire area, close the vehicle windows and air vents, turn on headlights and

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drive slowly. If an officer must leave the vehicle, he or she should not turn off the vehicle engine. Smoke and lack of oxygen from the fire may prevent the vehicle from starting. Avoid driving over fire hoses; but if it becomes necessary to drive over a fire hose, use caution and drive slowly, but do not stop. Cross at least three feet from the coupling.

GENERAL PROCEDURES

The LAFD Incident Commander has overall command responsibility of brushfire incidents. The Department's mission is to support the LAFD Incident Commander.

FIRST RESPONDER

The first unit at scene, regardless of rank, is responsible for directing the Department's initial response and shall ensure that a situation estimate is obtained and forwarded to the LAFD (if not at scene) and Communications Division. The situation estimate shall include:

- **Name of the area involved** - Use Thomas Guide if necessary (i.e., for canyon/hillside names). Include street boundaries if available.
- **Wind direction and speed** - During Santa Ana wind conditions, brushfires move faster than normal.
- **Type of area** - Canyon or hillside and type of vegetation (trees, brush, etc.). Are structures being threatened by the fire?
- **Threatened critical locations** - Hospitals, schools, assisted-living facilities or nursing homes, camps, etc.
- **Ingress and egress routes** - For LAFD equipment to respond. Note which streets may be too narrow or blocked by vehicles. Take action to prevent these routes from being blocked by traffic attempting to enter the area.

The first responding unit shall coordinate the Department's initial response with LAFD and other City departments until relieved.

AREA WATCH COMMANDER

Upon learning of an Unusual Occurrence or an emergency having the potential of becoming an Unusual Occurrence, the watch commander of the involved Area **shall** designate a supervisor or senior officer as acting watch commander and **shall** immediately go to the LAFD Incident Command Post (ICP) and assume command of police operations. If appropriate, the watch commander shall implement Area Standing Plans and initiate and command and control move up.

During the early stages of an Unusual Occurrence (prior to activation of the DOC), it is essential that communications between the police operations and the concerned area station remain open. The watch commander assuming command of police operations shall establish an open telephone line (when possible) or use a tactical frequency to accomplish these communications links. The Area Watch Commander shall:

- Go to the scene and assume command of police operations. Take this guide with you.

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- Join and/or establish an Incident/Unified Command Post with LAFD.
- Ensure that an updated situation estimate has been communicated to Communications Division and the DOC:
 - Location of the emergency.
 - Size of the involved area (actual and potential).
 - Apparent direction of the fire.
 - Type of area (business, residential, hillside, etc.).
 - Ingress/egress routes for emergency vehicles.
 - Additional Department personnel required and location of Staging Area. (Emphasize numbers of people, not units.)
 - Location and radio designation of the police operations.
- Declare a Tactical Alert (if required).
- Advise responding personnel of the appropriate officer-safety considerations. For brushfire survival information refer to Page 30 of the Supervisors Field Operations Guide (FOG) – Incident Checklists/Fires.
- Dispatch personnel to maintain:
 - Perimeter control to keep unauthorized vehicles and pedestrians out of the area, in accordance with direction from the LAFD Incident Commander.
 - Ingress/egress routes for emergency vehicles.
 - If evacuations have occurred, establish interior patrols where practical.

Note: In a fire emergency, the LAFD Incident Commander has the responsibility to determine if an area will be closed, what the boundaries of the closed area will be, and what entry criteria will be used. Generally, there is no legal authority to keep out members of the Press who have valid passes. Additionally, LAFD may issue Fire Line Passes to selected persons (see ACCESS INTO CLOSED AREAS, Page 6).

- If the LAFD Incident Commander orders evacuation of an area, refer to Page 27 of the Supervisor's FOG- Incident Checklists/Evacuations. (Evacuation notifications for brushfires are the responsibility of LAFD and will be ordered by the LAFD through their established emergency notification protocols)

Note: LAFD has a policy that residents may remain in the closed area to attempt to protect their homes during brushfires. Officers **shall** attempt to identify residents and complete a Field Interview Report (Form 15.43.00) for all residents that remain in the closed area. The Field Interview Report **shall** be forwarded to police operations in the Incident/Unified Command Post. For Specialized Resources, refer to Pages 11-12 of this Guide.

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REAL-TIME ANALYSIS AND CRITICAL RESPONSE DIVISION/DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS CENTER

Upon notification of a brushfire that has the potential for evacuations or the need for significant Department resources, the following actions shall be taken:

- The DOC shall be activated at Level I and the Department placed on Modified Tactical Alert.
- The DOC shall specifically notify all Traffic Divisions of the potential need for Motor Strike Teams (MST) and determine the number of MSTs available for deployment to the incident.
- The DOC shall contact the Planning Section at the Incident/Unified Command Post and provide the Department's resource availability.
- Notify all appropriate staff including the Commanding Officer, RACR Division.
- Notify the Commanding Officer of Emergency Operations Division.

TACTICAL ALERT

A Tactical Alert provides for the controlled redistribution of on-duty personnel to achieve the personnel level necessary for control of a major police incident. The watch commander (any rank), the Incident Commander (any rank), the Communications Division Watch Commander, or the Director of Emergency Operations, may initiate a Tactical Alert. When there is a need for a Tactical Alert, it **shall** be initiated as soon as possible to restrict voluntary responses and avoid depletion of personnel from the involved Area and surrounding geographic Areas.

The officer declaring a Tactical Alert, shall provide the Communications Division Watch Commander with the following information:

- Location and nature of incident.
- Anticipated personnel and equipment needs.
- Anticipated duration of incident.
- Likelihood of the incident escalating (short and long term).

Watch commanders shall maintain an accounting of on-duty personnel on the Unusual Occurrence Personnel Status Report, Form 14.03, in accordance with instructions on the form and forward the completed form by fax to the Police DOC (if activated).

RACR/DOC fax numbers: (213) 237-9935
(213) 237-9936

Note: For additional information on Tactical Alerts, refer to Pages 36-43 of Volume 1 of the Emergency Operations Guide, Policy and Procedures, Personnel Mobilization Plan-Tactical Alert.

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ACCESS INTO CLOSED AREAS (Section 409.5 California Penal Code)

NO-ACCESS

Prohibits unauthorized persons from entering the closed area.

LIMITED ACCESS

Allows persons into the closed area according to criteria established by the Unified Command. The following may be considered:

- Residents with valid identification and service providers that support people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs.
- Public utility employees.
- Credentialed Animal Regulation employees/volunteers.
- Persons with valid Press passes.

Note: At the scene of a fire, police officers **shall** permit members of the Press with proper identification to enter a closed area. They should be directed not to block emergency vehicles or hamper emergency operations, warned of the possible dangers, and allowed to proceed. In cases where Press vehicles may block emergency access, the vehicles may be excluded.

FIRE LINE PASSES

The LAFD – Board of Fire Commissioners issues Fire Line Passes to residents to identify pass holders as members of the community who have demonstrated an active and constructive interest toward the LAFD's aims, programs and operations. There are presently three categories of passes:

- One-year pass (blue)
- Four-year pass (blue)
- Lifetime pass (white)

Note: Possession of a Fire Pass does not automatically grant access into a closed area if the presence of the holder/holder's vehicle impairs emergency operations. Entry into a closed area is at the discretion of the LAFD Incident Commander.

PERIMETER CONTROL

INGRESS AND EGRESS

Control of selected ingress and egress routes shall be maintained to:

- Help secure access routes into the involved area;
- Prevent unauthorized persons from entering.